

Poem of assorted memorable quotes:

Welcome to my country!
This is the life.
Ain't got no money.
You are playing with your blood.
Come, drink tea! Drink tea!
This is the good life.
Thanks be to god I am happy.
You are the sun.
You are the stars.
The strugglers for peace.
There is a problem.
The situation is bad.
There are soldiers.
Bulldozers working.
The Yanto law.
What's your name?
My name is William. I am from America.
Bush is crazy, Bush is not good.
Give me money!
Ain't got no money.
Occupation is bullshit.
There's a tank in my street.
I want to go home.
I want to eat.
Where is peace?
There is no peace.
Drink tea, drink tea.
It's in the Koran.

This is the Life.

Collected works: Palestine/Israel Jan-Apr 2003



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They do the Rachel Corrie Fund which gives scholarships for low income activists. To donate tax-deductible money (and if you have enough money to be concerned about tax deduction you should give some away) write checks and stuff to:

Middle East Children's Alliance (Rachel Corrie Fund)
405 Vista Heights

El Cerrito, CA 94530

Colorado: Colorado Campaign for Mid-East Peace www.ccmeep.org
ccmeep_organizer@yahoo.com 720-956-0700

Political, military and corporate criminals:

Caterpillar Inc.
100 NE Adams St. Peoria IL 61629
Glen Barton, chairman and CEO
c/o Benjamin Cordani
cordani_benjamin_s@cat.com
PR office: 309-675-1000

Israeli Ministry of Defense 972-3-69-55476

Israeli Foreign Office: 972-2-530-7704

Ariel Sharon's private cell phone number: 972-3-666-5342 (just kidding)

U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv 972-3-519-7479

U.S. Consulate 972-2-7236

Resource List:

Books:

Palestine Joe Sacco. *A great comic book, sort of a 'graphic documentary'.*
One Land, Two Peoples Deborah Gerner
The Fateful Triangle Noam Chomski
The Question of Palestine and other books by Edward Said
Islam: a Short History Karen Armstrong
The Yellow Wind David Grossman. *Israeli writer goes to Palestine, settlements, etc., talks to people*
Drinking the Sea at Gaza Amira Hass

Articles:

"Power and Sexuality in the Middle East." Bruce Dunne.
"Refugee Status." Yossi Halevi, The New Republic 8/19/02 (available at vancouver.indymedia.org)

Websites:

*News:
www.haaretzdaily.com (decent mainstream Israeli English language newspaper.)
www.electronicintifada.org
www.palestinemonitor.org
*Peace and Activism:
www.pchr.org (Palestinian center for human rights)
www.taayush.org
www.gush-shalom.org
www.womeninblack.net
www.holylandtrust.org
www.tikkun.org
www.al-awda.org (Palestine Right to Return Coalition)
www.ektaonline.org/~quitpale (Queers Undermining Israeli Terrorism)
www.middleeastinfo.org
www.rebuildinghomes.org (Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions)
www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/palestine
*Rachel Corrie Memorial:
www.distanceedesign.com/rachel/

ISM:

www.palsolidarity.org
e-mail info@palsolidarity.org
media office in Beit Sahour: 972-2-277-4602
*for international calls dial 011 then the number.

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Dedication: For Rachel, Tom, and Brian, of course

and also

This book is dedicated to the dead, whose bodies I lifted and carried: Tamir Khdeer and Rachel Corrie. I lifted the head and shoulders of both; Stephan lifted Tamir's legs and a Palestinian Red Crescent worker lifted Rachel's legs.

To everyone who, after dying, finds their body stranded in a border area full of armed men who prevent their body from being taken to burial.

And to three points of inspiration: the love which burns and flows between people, without which we will die. . . the latent poetry in every incomplete moment. . . and the vision which motivates us to do impossible things, like stop an armored bulldozer with a fragile human body or grow an avocado tree from a seed

The ISM

While in Palestine I worked with the International Solidarity Movement, which describes itself as "a movement of Palestinian and International activists working to raise awareness of the struggle for Palestinian freedom and an end to Israeli occupation, which uses nonviolent, direct action methods of resistance to confront and challenge illegal Israeli occupation forces and policies." Activists come from the U.S., Canada, Sweden, Denmark, Italy, Spain, Ireland, Britain, Japan, Australia. . . so many nations. For information about ISM check out www.palsolidarity.org

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There are other victims of this intolerance: in Rafah, prostitutes were killed and the theater was burned down. In Jenin, a shop owner who sold alcohol was threatened; when he refused to stop selling booze his shop was burned.

In his article "Refugee Status," published in the New Republic (8/19/02), Yossi Halevi describes the plight of Palestinian gay men forced to flee to Israel. Israel is definitely the safest place in the middle east to be openly queer. Yet men who go to Israel often face threats of deportation back to the occupied territories, where they may be tortured or killed. Usually they live the poverty-stricken, marginal life of refugees, without access to legal employment or health care, often harassed by Israeli police. Many work as prostitutes on the streets of Tel Aviv. Halevi estimates that around 600 Palestinian gays currently live in Israel. They are denied legal asylum by the government, and ignored by international, Palestinian, and Israeli human rights groups alike.

Usually the P.A. labels gays as collaborators. One man was arrested during the fast of Ramadan, thrown in a pit, and denied food and water until he died. Another was imprisoned for months, where P.A. "interrogators cut him with glass and poured toilet cleaner into his wounds." A young man from Gaza was seduced by an undercover cop, arrested, then told that if he "wanted to avoid prison, he too would have to become an undercover sex agent, luring gays into orchards and turning them over to the police. When he refused, the police hung him by his arms from the ceiling. Then "a high-ranking officer he didn't know arranged for his release and demanded sex as a payback." He fled to the West bank, where he was arrested and "forced to stand in sewage water up to his neck, his head covered by a sack filled with feces." (quotes are from Halevi) Death threats from family members are also common.

The increased restriction of movement in the occupied territories, for example the recent closure of the entire Gaza strip which locked out workers trying to return home from Israel for weeks on end, make it even more difficult to escape persecution in Palestine. One San Francisco Bay Area activist organization, QUIT (Queers Undermining Israeli Terrorism) points out in its "Statement on the Persecution of Gay Men by the Palestinian National Authority" that if the Right to Return were recognized, these men could move to their ancestral villages in Israel, where they would have full legal and human rights. Some gay authors in the U.S. have used the persecution Halevi describes as evidence to justify the occupation. Certainly abuses against gays, prostitutes, and other Palestinian people by The P.A., families, and Islamic groups complicates the situation. If I were Palestinian and lived in Gaza, I would face the tragic dilemma of either hiding and pretending to be straight while living in fear of arrest and torture, or escaping to Israel, only to face police repression, possible deportation, and life as an outlaw refugee. This makes it impossible to perceive the occupation and violence in Palestine/Israel as a black-and-white, us-versus them conflict. This perception is fallacious anyway: within the boundaries of the Israeli state and Palestinian occupied territories there is a diversity of ethnic, religious, and cultural groups. Many Arabs in the West Bank are Christian; an entire section of Old Jerusalem is inhabited by Armenians; Druze--Arab members of a divergent Islamic sect which believes in reincarnation--live in Israel and often work for the Israeli border police; Bedouin live in Israel, and are usually very poor. Their nomadic way of life has been destroyed by urbanization.

After I crossed Erez into Israel prior to returning to the U.S., I hitched a ride with a Bedouin taxi driver. When I told him how Israeli police at Erez detained and searched me for two hours because after Rachel was killed they learned that I was an ISM activist, he insisted on driving me to the nearest bus station free of charge. "Israeli, Palestinian, it makes no difference," he said. "You are a guest in this country. You should be treated well. If you were a guest in a Bedouin house, the host would die to save your life."

Haran (Forbidden by Islamic Law): gay refugees and other casualties of small-minded prejudice and ignorance. Human rights = rights for all people!

The LSD was fading, and it was a micro-dose anyway; just enough to magnify the beauty of the ancient coniferous forest, the cliffs, islands, and pinnacles rising and falling from the Pacific... sea anemones and driftwood, the smell of salt brine and kelp, rhythmic patterns of sand, tide, waves echoing lullabies about power and infinity. After wandering there and back maybe five miles we sat and talked as the sun sank into ocean staining the fading day's light blood golden, and suddenly there it was: a shrieking jet-powered death machine crashing out of the sky and diving low along the beach. Maybe it was a coast guard pilot practicing his moves; definitely it was big and dark and designed to kill and it shattered the air far too close for comfort.

That jet looked like a harbinger: in less than a week I would fly to Israel. The Bush crew was repeating "war is inevitable, war is inevitable" as a brainwash mantra; they even had radical anti-war folks playing the repeat-after-me game, parroting "war is inevitable."

Inevitable my ass; like saying it is inevitable that our elected officials lie to us. All they have to do is stop lying or not preemptively invade Iraq, as the case may be. Inevitable in this context meant we, George Bush, Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell, etc., plan to attack Iraq. Just you try and stop us! In any case, there I was, soaking up some wilderness on the eve of a journey into a land where war machines are commonplace, when this fighter jet showed up like a hard reminder.

I sat on that beach with a man, a friend, a lover in complex ways. A man without whom this trip would have been impossible... to whom I owe a heartfelt thank you. As an openly bisexual person, I feel it is important to write about the plight of queer people in Palestine and Israel. Although I did talk to other ISM activists about this, I did not ask any of the Palestinians I met about social mores around same-sex relations. I did observe how people behaved. The gender roles are different there, and, especially in more "traditional" areas such as Gaza there is a fairly strict separation of male and female space. Because of this, the men spend a lot of time together, hanging out with other men. Displays of man-to-man affection which are taboo in the USA are not uncommon in Gaza. For example, several times I saw two men walking in the street holding hands. Some men appear to have a level of deep friendship and comfort in the company of other men, that is seldom found in the U.S. American men treat each other like shit. It's a problem.

There is an Arabic word, *habibi*, which is often translated as "sweetheart." Basically it means someone you love. Men call each other, as well as girlfriends, *habibi*. Relations between women I cannot speak with any authority about, and I found virtually no information about queer women.

Research about gay people in Palestine yielded disturbing results. In his article, "Power and Sexuality in the Middle East," Bruce Dunne states that "until recently, Islamic Societies have been more tolerant of same-sex sexual practices" than Christian societies were. However, pre-colonial Arab society was patriarchal, and, like in ancient Greece, sex was generally construed in terms of dominance and submission. Dunne continues, "sex... took place between dominant, free adult men and subordinate social inferiors: wives, concubines, boys, prostitutes (male and female) and slaves (male and female)." Despite the view that receptive or effeminate men were inferior, male dancers and entertainers who dressed in drag were very popular.

In Palestine right now it is illegal to be gay. Punishments include death, torture, and exile, and are enforced by the Palestinian Authority police, families, and community members. This is an effect of the societal shift toward more intolerant interpretations of Islamic law, which is largely a response to occupation and colonialism by 'westernized' Israel.

Introduction:

What follows is a collection of writing and artwork about my time in Palestine/Israel during January through March 2003. I spent over a month in the South Gaza refugee city of Rafah, as well as a couple weeks in both Tel Aviv and Jenin. In the back pages you will find a resource list which includes some educational books and related websites, should you desire to learn more about Palestine or activate and go there yourself. If you decide to go over, I recommend talking at some length with people who have been there prior to departing.

People love to talk about the problems in Palestine and Israel. I would discuss the situation with friends before I went over, propose solutions, analyze Jewish history, speculate about the future. To those who are not directly involved this is a sort of political conundrum, a puzzle to be solved in the abstract territory of the mind. To those directly involved and directly effected by the occupation, it is a force which controls and arbitrates life and death on both sides of the green line. Occupation dehumanizes and oppresses both the soldiers who are ordered to enforce a governmental policy of routine human rights violations and the people who suffer from their abuse and violence. The punishment for an Israeli soldier who refuses to serve in the occupied territories is jail time, usually six months and often more. The punishment for intentionally shooting a Palestinian child is nothing, no jail time, no consequence. The consequence for a Palestinian youth who throws rocks at a tank parked on the main street of his home town can be summary execution. There is something basically wrong with this situation.

The U.S. media reinforces the myth that this is an equal conflict, a cycle of violence wherein both sides have equal power to fight or seek peace. This is not true. Power lies overwhelmingly in the hands of the Israeli military. Palestinian fighters will never defeat the Israeli army; they are simply not well enough armed or organized. Suicide bombings have come about as a tactic of desperation, a way for people with very little money and few weapons to fight against a technologically sophisticated nuclear superpower funded with billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars. Military installations are always well guarded, so bombers often attack civilian targets. Bombings kill civilians and even children. Targeting civilians is illegal according to the 4th Geneva convention, and always tragic. However, it is common in the history of warfare and colonization. The Israeli army often targets civilians; killing of civilians by the U.S. army during the invasion of Iraq was either ignored by mainstream U.S. media or justified as necessary 'collateral damage.' Over 800 Israelis and 2000 Palestinians have been killed since the beginning of the Al-Aksa intifada. This is too many people killed. However, simply comparing body counts cannot accurately describe the effects of the occupation. In the occupied territories, the death and grief is compounded by increasing land confiscation, routine imprisonment without charges (administrative detention), road closures, invasions, beatings and harassment by soldiers, house demolitions, interference with the ability to travel, disruption of school by soldiers, refusal of the Israeli authorities to grant building permits, destruction of infrastructure including roads, electric, water, and telephone systems, unemployment and poverty, the inability to export goods or

travel to other countries without going through Israel, economic collapse, and other problems caused by military occupation and the expansion of settlements.

I do not see the occupation primarily as a conflict between Arabs and Jews. I see it as a colonial process similar to the land theft and genocide against native Americans on this continent. The actors involved change, but this tragedy has been replayed many times in the history of empire building and colonization. The challenge for me is to see the unique humanity of the people involved, while recognizing that there is a historical template, a cycle which is repeated in different forms. This pattern must be changed; it leads to endless suffering and unnecessary violence. We who live within the borders of the U.S. should study the occupation of Palestine not only because our government supports and pays for it but because the U.S. is now occupying Iraq. Already American soldiers have set up checkpoints on Iraqi roads, and Iraqis have done suicide bombings at American checkpoints. U.S. special forces trained with the Israeli army in the West Bank prior to the invasion of Iraq. On at least two occasions, occupying American soldiers have fired into crowds of Iraqi demonstrators, killing Iraqis. It does not help the American soldiers guard banks, gas stations, and oilfields while hospitals and city offices are looted. It does not help that American police rounded up and secretly imprisoned 800 to 100 Arab men after September 11th, with out revealing their location or the charges against them. This mimics Israeli administrative detention. It does not help that the same U.S. weapons manufacturers who get rich selling guns and bombs to the Israeli army are profiting from the invasion and occupation of Iraq, that no weapons of "mass destruction" have been found in Iraq, or that oil companies such as Chevron-Texaco are hooked up with fat contracts for Iraqi oil while millions of Iraqi people live in severe poverty. Occupation in Palestine has sowed the seeds of hatred and violence against Israelis. . . occupation in Iraq will do more to encourage attacks against American civilians than any Islamic militant organization ever did.

Another myth which must be discredited is the misperception that this is a conflict between all Israelis and all Palestinians. There is a Palestinian expression to the effect that the people are like a bag of onions- each head is different. This is also true of Israelis. As a worker in a Berqin metal shop told me, "this is a problem between the government of Israel, the government of America, the government of Palestine, not the people of these areas." Both are diverse societies which encompass a wide variety of viewpoints. Many people in Israel actively oppose the occupation individually or through organizations such as the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, Gush Shalom, Taayush, and the refusenik movement. To date 542 Israeli soldiers have refused to serve in the occupied territories. They face jail time. Many of the refuseniks agree to do whatever is necessary to defend Israelis within the 1967 national borders, but refuse to go into the West Bank and Gaza. Keep in mind that military service is mandatory for all men and women in Israel. It is difficult to be part of the peace movement there. In effect, living in the occupied territories is an act of resistance. I spoke to college students who see continuing their studies as resistance to occupation. There is at least one Palestinian organization, the Holy Land Trust, which teaches non-violence in the west bank. There is a history of street demonstrations and mass curfew breaking in

All day both days a macarver tank, the big kind with a giant cannon that can shoot armor piercing and explosive shells, hung around, at first hiding behind trees on the Destroyer's road near a makeshift pen full of sheep, then on day two driving into the open and parking only 300 yards away. Always when a macarver is present, the soldiers point that cannon at your head.



time it goes past. Everything has changed since Rachel was killed. We are more afraid of the bulldozers. Nobody wants to stand in their way unless they are going after something worth defending, like a house or an orchard. I look directly into the cab and stare as hard as I can, try to make eye contact.

I learned the power of eye contact at a demonstration in Tel Aviv. I went there with Alice and Greg after we accompanied Rachel's body to Israel. We marched with anarchists and Israeli peace activists, the march went by some IOF offices, this was only two days after Rachel was killed, and Alice and I started blocking the cars of IOF officers as they tried to enter a military installation. I sat down in front of an officer's Alfa Romeo, and he tried to keep driving, to push me out of the way or drive over me, so I looked him directly in the eye and pointed at him, then at myself. He stopped.

In any case the bulldozer driver leaned up close to the glass once and looked back at me and I saw his eyes from fifteen feet away. Scared eyes. Scared he would run over an international.

We are playing with our blood.

Tom and I talked to the farmers and they said they wanted us to protect their onion field, their houses, greenhouses. I drew a line with my mind along the edges of the onion field, went so far as to follow the edge of the field with my attention, then continue that line all the way to a point on the horizon. I chose a corner of the field closest to where the bulldozer was working and vowed to stand my ground, to stand in a balanced position with feet heavy in the dirt like roots. The bulldozer drove back and forth, moving dirt, crunching greenhouse wreckage. Later it almost ran over a donkey tied to a metal stake. Once for a tense minute I faced off with it, standing my ground and yelling at the driver, the gleaming blade aimed directly at me, advancing, stopping fifteen feet away. We stared at each other, then it backed away.

The farmers themselves are sad, quiet, beautiful people. The old grandfather, Al Haj, has a heart condition, and his sons were worried that the presence of tanks and bulldozers might cause a heart attack. After four hours of bulldozer watching, I tried to leave to buy food. They insisted that I stay and served me tea and food. Pita with jam and soft cheese, black tea with too much sugar in the late afternoon sun while the children crouched on the ground in a semicircle, watching with wild bright eyes. I remember the two middle-aged men, one with his worn brown leather coat and his kind, slightly wrinkled face, his bad teeth and sad eyes and his smile. He wore a black and white kofia around his neck and spoke enough English to explain how before the intifada they sold their vegetables in Israel, but now they cannot sell them. First they can't sell the cucumbers and tomatoes in Israel, then the bulldozers come to destroy their greenhouses and fields.

the West Bank, but demonstrations have been suppressed with IOF violence for years. There are plenty of people in Gaza who understand the difference between the occupying army and the Israeli populace. Organizations such as the Palestinian Center for Human Rights continue to work for human rights in the occupied territories. Their work is made difficult because Palestinian lawyers are unable to work in Israeli courts, and Israeli courts are the only place where IOF soldiers and commanders can be held accountable for human rights violations. Israel (and the U.S.) still refuse to join the International Criminal Court in order to shield soldiers, commanders, and government officials from being tried and convicted of war crimes and violations of international law.

Finally, although I spent some time in Israel, my intention was to live in the occupied Palestinian territories, to see and experience life there. We do not hear the Palestinian side of the story in the U.S. Most discussion here centers around suicide bombings, "terrorist organizations," governmental peace talks, and Israeli military incursions. Crucial issues such as the expansion of settlements, IOF attacks on civilians, destruction of homes and infrastructure, imprisonment of Palestinians without charges, the Israeli peace movement, torture and killing of gay men by the Palestinian Authority, etc. etc., are not reported in depth. Most people in the U.S. really don't know what's going down in the occupied territories. If they did, they would be shocked and outraged.



Brazil

After refugees were displaced to Rafah in 1948, several foreign governments aided with the construction of the refugee camps. One neighborhood of Rafah is called Brazil, because the Brazilian government helped to build it.

Monsoor carries the metal fire bin upstairs, walking backwards, cigarette burning down to filter in his mouth. He takes two legs, I take one. The logs burn between us, spilling the occasional coal on the tile stairs.

"Monsoor, I'm impressed!" I say.

"It's no problem," he says, "We do it this way."

We sit quiet in the dark by the wood fire, coals glowing orange and purple. We smoke, talk, drink tea. He asks about my family, my work, my education. He gets on the phone with a woman; they talk mellow in the night.

"You like to talk to my girlfriend?" he asks, handing me the phone. She speaks no English; I speak no Arabic. We say a few words to each other, words heard as babble and gibberish. Hand the phone back to Monsoor.

He lets me sleep in a big bed with grinning cartoon puppies on the quilt. I awake 3 or 4 times before dawn to nearby machine gun fire. On other nights locals have laughed and pantomimed dance steps as the guns go off, saying "This is the music of Palestine." Abu Jamil even went so far as to say, "without it we cannot sleep."

In the morning I get up and walk outside. In front of the house lie mangled wrecks of twisted concrete and rebar, which were once houses where families lived. I can still see the ruts made by tanks which rumbled into town only three weeks ago. Monsoor's mother stands in the yard surrounded by children, her quiet face wrinkled with lines of patient wisdom. A boy points beyond the demolished houses.

"The Tank!" he says.

I see dust, hear the growl of monster diesels. Two tanks are moving. Might as well have a look. Raise my hands in the air like surrender, like angel wings, like a shrug, and climb over dirt and junk to face the tank. It sits heavy like a grey-green steel rhinoceros, a stubborn creature of bulk and violence, a machine ignorant of flight and metaphor. This tank is of the variety commonly seen patrolling the periphery of Rafah: small, for a tank, and lacking the single large barrel which protrudes from the turret of the stereotypical tank. Instead, this tank's turret has various slits from which the narrow barrels of machine guns poke. It is designed for shooting people, not other armored vehicles. There are no armored vehicles in Rafah to shoot.

I have appointments to keep. I turn and walk away into streets full of sunshine and shouting children.

"YOU ARE DESTROYING THE FARMS OF SIX FAMILIES WHICH THEY DEPEND ON FOR THEIR LIVELIHOOD!!" WHY ARE YOU DESTROYING CIVILIAN INFRASTRUCTURE AND FAMILY FARMS:???"

During my last days in Rafah, I learned how to yell at bulldozers. Words cannot describe my absolute hatred of these machines. They are evil. Not the drivers, who are misguided human beings, but the machines themselves, which are tons of army colored bulletproof steel and hydraulic aggression designed and built for one reason: to destroy, to crush, to transform houses into apocalyptic wrecks of concrete rubble and rusty twisted re-bar. They as evil as the Salahadin Tower. The Salahadin Tower is Satan: a hulking black bulletproof structure sprouting antennae and wires, like the bridge of an aircraft carrier somehow transplanted at the end of a bustling city street. In any case, two consecutive days bulldozers came to Tel Sultan area, to the same conclave of family farms.

Six families, all the children and grandchildren of the same man, live in a group of small single-story houses there. A narrow dirt road leads to the houses. There is a sort of courtyard area between them with a big shade tree, a concrete patio, and lots of sand. Between the homes and the Destroyer's road these families own farmland, an olive orchard and greenhouses. A week before, bulldozers came and wrecked about an acre of greenhouses. Sheets of ripped translucent plastic, bent metal pipes, tangles of black plastic irrigation pipe and wire are strewn about the area, flotsam in the bulldozer's wake. Immature cucumber and tomato plants still cling to sandy soil amidst the debris. The first day bulldozers spend all afternoon scraping wreckage into piles. They don't go after any new greenhouses, olive trees, houses, or onion fields... perhaps because seven internationals and four journalists are present, watching with eyes and cameras.

The second day Tom and I go to Tel Sultan while the other internationals stay downtown. No journalists come. Tom has no camera. I have a 35 mm. ISM central in Beit Sahour sent us a video camera-- wonderful! Except somehow they didn't send batteries or film... so we take this camera that doesn't have any film or batteries and pretend to videotape the tanks and bulldozers with it. That's how broke we are. At least if the soldiers think that we are videotaping, they are less likely to kill people and destroy property.

I yell at tanks and bulldozers for the first time and realize I actually enjoy it-- seeing them makes me really angry, and yelling at them through the megaphone allows me to express some of this anger. You can't cuss them out or anything-- you have to tell it like it is. The Israeli soldiers usually yell one-line ideologic gems such as "Fuck you!" in English or "My cock is like stone," in Arabic. Our job is to raise the level of dialogue, to shout, "Stop destroying civilian infrastructure and demolishing Palestinian homes!" and suchlike. We also use the megaphones to announce our presence, to tell them that we are unarmed, are internationals, and are no threat to them. I stand right beside where one of the bulldozers is driving and yell at it every

Rachel, of course, was killed in front of this house.

I watch the war on TV in both Arabic and English. Abu Kareem puts on BBC because he is a good host. American prisoners of war frown, disoriented. Dead Iraqi kids, a kid in a hospital wrapped in bandages. Iraqi and American bodies sprawled in pools of blood. Blown-up houses, angry people in the street. Al Jazeera shows footage of anti-war demonstrations in America, in Britain, in Japan.

Kareem asks, "Why do they make this war?"

I ask his dad what Kareem thinks (Kareem can't speak English).

Samir replies, "He thinks it's for oil."

Simple Krik and I both agree that we are losing respect for the evil genius of the Bush administration; this terrible respect is eroding to reveal a hidden truth: they are stupid damn fools. Colin Powell on TV looks like a broken man. The spokeswoman for the Pentagon comes on in a pink blazer, frowning. All their strategy and greed add up to the ignorance of a schoolyard bully, nothing more.

III. Simple Krik

The children pronounce Greg as "Krik," and Salvadora added the simple. She wrote in ballpoint pen on masking tape stuck to a blue bic, "Krik is a simple man who only wants his lighter back." In Arabic, Krik means shovel. Mohammed tells Krik he will teach him everything there is to know in Shabura (his neighborhood) if Krik burns his passport.



Rafah, Gaza Strip, 1/31 Municipal Wells Destroyed:

Collective Punishment Continues

Wednesday night Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) destroyed two municipal water wells which provide approximately 50 percent of the water for the city of Rafah. Water use is currently restricted to 2 hours per day. The Rafah Municipal Department of Water and Wastewater informed IOF commanders about the exact location of these wells prior to the attacks. Despite the fact that these wells are crucial to maintaining basic health and sanitation in Rafah, the IOF specifically targeted them for demolition. Activists from the International Solidarity Movement stated that this demolition is yet another example of the IOF policy of collective punishment: all residents of the occupied Palestinian territories are routinely targeted by the IOF, regardless of whether or not they have any involvement with the armed resistance here.

Workers from the Water Department had to connect private agricultural wells to the main city water system in order to supply basic service. This irrigation water is unsafe for human use, yet many locals must drink tap water since they are unable to afford buying bottled water or filters. The two wells which were destroyed were the largest and most productive of the 6 wells serving the Rafah area. These wells are the only source of city water here.

Armored bulldozers used for this demolition came into the Al Hasash area on the Northwestern edge of Rafah from the militarized zone which isolates Rafah from Mawasi, a Palestinian village on the coast. Rafah is surrounded by a strip of barren land 100 to 300 meters wide which is patrolled by IOF tanks, bulldozers, and armored personnel carriers. Beyond this perimeter stand strategically placed guard towers, manned by IOF snipers. These conditions, in addition to the frequent shooting from tanks and guard towers, which regularly kills Palestinian civilians, and the 4 meter high steel wall under construction along the Gaza/Egypt border, make Rafah a virtual prison: it is as if the entire city is in jail. IOF Bulldozers often enter from the militarized zone to demolish houses on the edges of town. In the recent past a sewer installation near the Abu Zuhri wells targeted Wednesday night was also damaged by IOF demolition crews.

Ashraf Ghneim, director of municipal water and wastewater, stated that his department sent letters to European Union representatives in the area informing them of the situation. The EU often assists with the maintenance of infrastructure in economically depressed Gaza, where unemployment approaches 80 percent. Ghneim also stated that the Abu Zuhri wells may have been destroyed as reprisal for two IOF soldiers killed Tuesday night by Palestinian armed resistance. Other Rafah residents speculated that this destruction was a show of force ordered by Ariel Sharon, who was re-elected this week.

Peace activists from the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) co-operated with the municipal water department in order to protect another well also located dangerously near to the IOF militarized zone. Four activists from the United States, Britain, and Sweden spent the night at the well.

Tamir Khdeer

I never touched a dead body before. Joe kept rubber gloves in one of the many pockets of his vest. Latex on my hands Stephan took the legs I took the arms. We lifted Tamir's corpse and laid it on the military green stretcher as Jihan approached. A Kalashnikov clip lay still packed with ammo, a black crescent heavy on sand. She stuffed the clip in the back pocket of her jeans then insisted on helping to carry the stretcher.

The wound in Tamir's gut gaped dry as a desert canyon, crusty and yellow-green. His arm, flung above his head as he died, had stiffened. The elbow joint popped when I picked him up. His shirt torn open, baring stomach... below his knees fabric ripped and bullet gashes in skin and muscle. Nobody wears short pants in this country, not even the dead, not even in summer. Tamir is long gone, leaving a peaceful boy's face and a heavy meat shadow on the stretcher.

The absence of short pants is not as foreign as the surging wave of Palestinian men who surround us as we approach the offices on the Gaza side of the Rafah-Egypt border crossing. Less than an hour earlier, Israeli soldiers shot over our heads and at the ground within one meter of our feet. Jenny was hit in the leg, by shrapnel she said. It left a deep purple bruise. Then they came with a tank and a bulldozer and destroyed an acre of young olive trees. It is so sudden, this destruction: years of some farmer's work gone in minutes. Now a hundred men and boys rush into the open and take the stretcher. Aren't they afraid of being shot?

We were called because the ambulance was not allowed to get Tamir's body. There was a joke that we are the "international rescue team" and that we should wear superhero outfits. It's a silly joke: although everyone secretly wants to be a superhero, no one is comfortable with being the only bulletproof people in town. Turns out we aren't bulletproof or bulldozer proof after all--only bullet resistant. Tom Herndall shot in the head, comatose, Rachel killed. No such thing as bulletproof people, only people who are not afraid to die.

behind us stand houses crowded with extended families, kids, moms, grandfathers... on our right bulldozer tracks and torn earth lead to the destruction we have interrupted: half a roof fallen in, rooms cracked open... beneath our feet a concrete slab tilted atop rubble. These are the cycles and stages: study them as you would a mandala, a tarot reading, the phases of the moon.

If you want to kill a tree, cut a circular strip of bark all the way around the trunk and tear it away. Alternatively, take a chainsaw to the trunk, block out all sunlight, or deprive it of water. And if you want to kill a city?

We decide to leave now since the bulldozer has gone. Maybe it will come back tonight or tomorrow or go to Brazil and crush a house or a mosque there. In any case, we do not want to draw children into danger. As we walk away slow, the tank reverses, revs its engine, and rumbles off. They did not shoot today. Half a house stands there like some apocalyptic architect's cutaway view. People swarm into that house and begin carrying away possessions and salvaging building materials amid the foissam of razor wire, shards of rusty metal roofing, cinder blocks, and cement junk that ripples deeper into Rafah each week like driftwood along the encroaching tides of occupation.

II. The War on TV

The war is on TV every night at Samir abu Kareem's house. Abu Kareem is a pharmacist, the manager of a pharmacy clinic with ten assistant pharmacists who work under him. He is a thin, tall man who chain-smokes, wears a brown leather jacket, and likes to play with his kids. The kids are wonderful, especially Kareem who is fourteen years old and gets up at 6:00 AM to walk to school, and Aman, who is too young to go to school and who forgets to plug in the electric pita bread warmer but is very playful.

When I first meet Aman, Abu Kareem calls her "Hero."
He says, "Not hero because very strong, but because of what is inside."

Abu Kareem's wife, whose name I don't know but should, cooks excellent food and makes her own pita-style bread from an Egyptian recipe. It is frustrating that I must sit and watch the war on TV instead of talking her into teaching me how to cook. This is because of gender roles.

The family lives in a two story a house on the front line: the back of their house is right against the Destroyer strip along the Egyptian border. Four rooms in the house have bullet holes in the interior walls. Tanks drive by every night but, while I sleep here the house is only machine-gunned once. Rabid bursts of fire awaken Krik and I in the wee hours of the morning. Bullets slam into the wall. We go back to sleep after the shooting stops: what else is there to do? In the morning Abu Kareem and his wife point out new bullet holes in the paint and plaster.

You know this woman has come so far to this country to die,
You know to stop the bulldozers that destroy the houses.
All the people thank this woman and all the people are very sad.
All the time we don't forget this woman.
She is a Palestinian woman and she do all the Palestinian woman do.

You know, maybe I don't know her big time
But I know her.

*It is common, in English writings by Palestinians, to refer to killings by the Israeli army as "assassinations". Consider the difference between "assassination" and "collateral damage".

What Happens In Rafah:

L. Home Demolition

We stand on wrecked concrete and twisted re-bar which was once another family home facing yet another armored killing machine. We know that only racism and class privilege prevent the soldiers inside from shooting us. Meanwhile grade school children wander amid olive trees within view of the tank and local journalists film the spectacle from the shelter of an abandoned construction site. One tank and one bulldozer are present. We have interrupted the demolition of a home with our banners, our messages hand painted on thin white cotton, our megaphones, our bodies.

These are the cycles and stages of housing on the dangerous perimeter of Rafah, on the wrong side of an invisible line drawn by distant Israeli bosses who never come here and say "Salaam Aleikum" to or drink tea with the people they are displacing. To us here on the ground those bosses are as faceless and inhuman as we are to them. Why don't they come here and taste the fruit of their policies? Who are they, what are their names, their stories, their motivations, these humans who can glance at a city map, pencil a line through it's outskirts, and order in the bulldozers to crush all houses outside this line? I want to peel away their money and jobs and cars, dress them in torn jeans and used sweatshirts, and set them down between a house and a bulldozer.

These are the cycles and stages: to our left rectangular columns rise from a foundation and dead end in air. That house may never be completed; it was started before the intifada and now will likely be taken by the bulldozers. Scant yards

McDonald's

M is for McDonalds. 'Billions and billions served.' After navigating Erez, the border crossing from Gaza into Israel, Ramone and I hitched a ride in a car coming from a nearby settlement, a white double-cab four-wheel drive pickup-- just like in America. The driver was a man, maybe 35 years old, baseball cap and mirror sunglasses. He was friendly in the way that men who have money and like to have fun are friendly. If he was American he would watch baseball, drink beer with his buddies, maybe even snowboard. All I had to do was point down the road and there he was, like magic, with his kind-hearted middle-class beauty of a girlfriend. Maybe they eat at McDonalds on occasion, when they are in a hurry. She was visibly disturbed when I described the situation in Rafah.

She asked, "Do they have public transportation there?"

I said no, they have taxis. Every car is a taxi, or at least that is how it seems. And every taxi is a Mercedes diesel. Gazans are sensible about cars: a Mercedes diesel holds the world record for mileage. Someone drove it for a million miles before it died. So Mercedes diesels are good if you know that you will never have any money to buy a new car and you have to drive taxi every day to live. It's what you would call a good investment.

M is for McDonalds. That's where the driver of that pickup dropped us off. The McDonalds was in a bus station in Ashqelon. Earlier the driver said, "I've been to Gaza. I used to go often. I like Palestinians. I used to have a lot of Palestinians who worked for me."

Now he doesn't go to Gaza and he doesn't have any Palestinian workers. That's because the Israeli government and army make it very difficult for Israelis to go there and for Palestinians to leave. There is some sort of travel ban which generally prohibits Palestinians from leaving and Israelis from coming to Gaza. It means economic warfare, less jobs, less money, more poverty for Gazans.

M is for McDonalds. Billions and billions of cubic yards of rainforest ecosystem destroyed to make way for beef cattle. Billions and billions of underpaid non-union workers. Billions and billions of dollars trickling upward into the bank accounts of bosses CEOs and stockholders. Billions and billions more spent on advertising. Don't those Palestinians have any sense? They should buy stock in McDonalds and forget about the intifada. But people like them probably don't have the fiscal know-how to manage a well-balanced portfolio. That's okay: McDonalds is a place for everyone. It's a dream of free market utopia. If they would just grow up and realize there is no future in Gaza, and if those A-rabs would quit their bickering and act like civilized adults, all this conflict would be unnecessary. All the people in Palestine could be re-located to post-war Iraq. Once the USA is done over there, that whole country will be bombed down to bedrock. Everyone knows that bedrock provides a solid foundation for pouring concrete. McDonalds would be glad to build concrete

factories in post-war Iraq and put all the Palestinians to work grinding up South American rainforest beef for hamburgers. Or Gaza could be turned into a big Free Trade Zone and they could all go to work in clean, sanitary, modern factories making paper cartons for Big Macs. Everybody knows that McDonalds cares about the environment: that is why Big Macs come in cardboard cartons now instead of styrofoam. Styrofoam is bad for the ozone.

M is for McDonalds. Ramone orders a Big Mac meal and I order a coffee. After extensive experimentation and research, I have concluded that there are only three redeeming aspects to western civilization: coffee, chocolate, and booze. All three are poisons in disguise. I'll let you in on a secret: McDonalds spends almost as much money on their coffee as they do on their food. So the coffee isn't quite as bad as one might expect.

S is for soldier, sha'hiid, security, and sacrifice. Sha'hiid means martyr, means someone who died as a result of occupation. There are security guards outside McDonalds in Israel. They have metal detectors and pistols. There are there to make the world safe for a pathetic illusion of democracy which rings false like the glossy pornographic ad images of juicy burgers dripping technicolor mustard and vibrant crimson ketchup. They are there to make the world safe for work place tyranny, low wages, and the oxymoron of 'free market capitalism' wherein nothing whatsoever is free. Soldiers are what warriors become when they lose their honor, put on a uniform, and go to work for money or because the government forces them to go to work. Soldiers are fighters who don't understand jihad: jihad is action in service of community and the divine creator. Fighting is actually the least desirable form of jihad. The problem with war today is not that wars are happening, it is that they are fought in the wrong way for the wrong reasons. What the hell kind of war is Kalashnikovs and rocks against tanks and nuclear bombs anyway? What the hell kind of war is missiles with a 100 mile range operated by an army too broke from ten years of economic sanctions to buy spare parts for their airplanes against ICBM nukes, spy satellites, and stealth bombers? Lousy no-count dishonorable war. All fighters with self-respect should avoid it like the plague.

McDonalds is where cows go when all their dignity is robbed from them, when they are killed with no respect for the life within them. The problem with hamburgers today is not that cows are killed to make them, it is that no one says thank-you to the cows. The epidemic spread of McDonalds on earth is symptomatic of a planetary spiritual malaise much more devastating than E Coli. There are too damn many soldiers, too much security, and too many sha'hiid.

S is for sacrifice. What is the meaning of sacrifice?

Finally, once and for all, let me ask what the world trade center bombing has to do with this or anything? Fellow Americans, perhaps 9-11 is best regarded as an emergency wake-up call. Like this: your phone rings like an explosion, you answer, and someone tells you in a language you neither speak nor understand that you are

At our first meeting she did not know anything.

She said she wanted to meet all the women and girls here.
I took her to my uncle's house.
Maybe she never met a Palestinian before.
She is very very happy.

The first night when they slept at the water well,
all the group want to be in Tel Sultan but Rachel stayed here.

All the group is in Tel Sultan,
she is alone in Yibna,
she lose telephone,
she can't find her way because she is new.
She call me.

I don't know what is the problem. She is afraid.
I tell her I know someone who can bring her here.

We sit here,
all the group,
me and my brother,
sit here talking and eating and laughing.

You know I am very, very sad.
You know before she died she call me and say I will see you soon.
I stand here and I wait.
I think maybe she is not coming this way, she is coming the other way.

You know at 4:20 she call me. (*She died at 5:00*)

You know she was the same as people here.
What people here eat, she eat. Zahtar and olives.
She come to my mother and my mother not speak English, Rachel not speak Arabic,
but my mother understand.

When the tank come to destroy the mosque here
she go and stand to stop the bulldozer to destroy the mosque.

She love this place.
She say, "I can feel how the woman here feel."
I say, "If you want to know how the woman here feel,
you can marry and stay here all your life."

She all the time wanted to learn everything.
I tell her, "You take time, take time, it is easy to know everything."

Rachel, the machine guns are shooting at Rafah again tonight while the roosters are crowing. Maybe the machine guns wake them up and they get confused and think it's morning. The machine guns are shooting at Rafah again while a military drone flies overhead, but the people sleep anyway because they live here.

Despite the reality that we are playing with our blood, despite the myth of heroism which obscures the shit tits of life, despite the complexity revealed by careful attention, Simple Krik burned his pants at your memorial on the concrete rooftop above our apartment in Rafah. He said you always voiced a desire to burn those pants. There was a rainbow above the city that afternoon and your incredible pink jumpsuit which hung on a clothesline nearby kept blowing in the wind and fluttering against my back and face. This is why my favorite memory of you is when we were driving to San Francisco and stopped at the chocolate dumpster in Ashland. We dug through the discarded wrappers and plastic bags to find two pounds of bar chocolate. Then you said, "thank you for taking me to this blessed place."

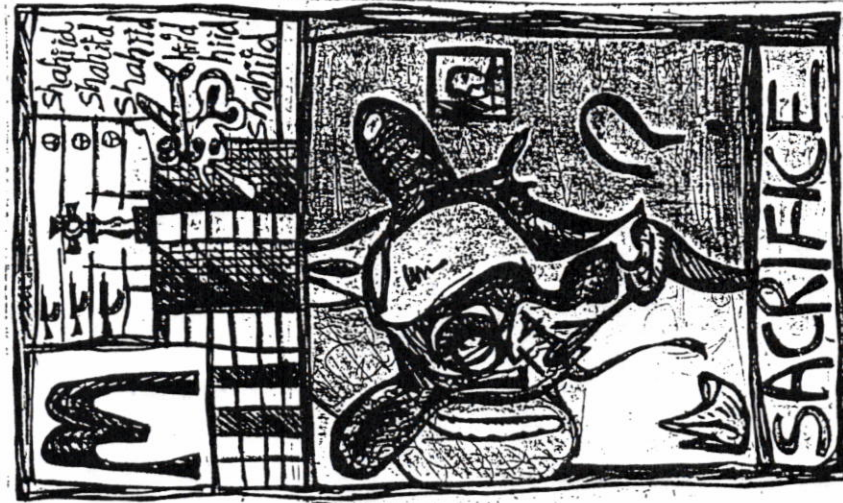
Monsoor Speaks about Rachel

What follows is a transcription, as close to verbatim as possible, of what Monsoor said when Krik and I asked him about Rachel after she was assassinated. At first he didn't want to talk and didn't quite understand what we wanted. I explained that, if he liked, I wanted to write down a message for Rachel's friends and family in America. "What would you like to say to her family?" I asked. He replied that he would talk for a while, and that I could write down whatever I wanted. Block J, Tel Sultan, and Yibna are the names of areas/neighborhoods. Monsoor's house is in another area called Brazil, about 1 mile from where Rachel was killed in Hy Salaam. She planned to visit him and his family that afternoon. The Block J tent was an attempt to stop tanks from shooting houses and people in that neighborhood by placing our bodies between the tank and the houses. The Israeli soldiers fired all around the tent, making it ineffectual: that first night, tracers went by only a couple feet above the top of the tent.*

The first day when Rachel come here, Jenny and Joe tell me that a new woman has come here. They say they want to put her in Block J. They say the first night in block J all the Israelis shoot at the tent and she is very afraid. She did not smoke and she start to smoke.

part of a larger world, that there are many people in that world, and many of them are very angry because the secret fingers of USA, of government, of CIA, of covert military operations, of training programs for killer militias, of military aid to dictatorial thugs, these hidden tentacles of USA have killed their mothers, sisters, sons, tortured their friends, imprisoned their fathers and daughters, destroyed their homes. It is time to start learning the language this warning is given in, and simply condemning a language as evil is not how to learn it. Do you actually believe that sad line about suicide bombers being cowards who are afraid to fight fair and in the open? Consider, for a moment, the total dedication necessary to willingly die for what you are fighting for. How does this compare with the courage it takes to sit in a cockpit thousands of feet above the ground, facing erratic salvos of inaccurate fire from antique anti-aircraft guns, knowing your chances of surviving the war are as good as your chances of surviving the commute to work through traffic, and to press a button that releases a missile? Perhaps suicide bombers are desperate people who know full well that their suffering is a direct result of U.S. imperialism.

C is for coca-cola. Rachel sees a coca-cola delivery truck parked on a narrow Arab street. "Our embassy," she says. Poison in disguise.



Mohammed Comes Over at Ten

I. In sha'allah

Mohammed comes over at ten. He knocks firm and quiet on the hollow grey steel door. That is how I know it is him and not some errant kid up past his bedtime, on a mission to bother the foreigners. They are like boys who turn over a rotten log, discover some mysterious creature, a salamander, a toad, or a centipede, then poke it with a stick to see what it does. Poke, Poke. If the Salamander does not move, they poke it again to see if it will move this time; if it moves, they poke it again to continue the entertainment. We are salamanders to them: mysterious with our bleached skin and our English and our strange habits. They tug at my clothes, open my backpack, stand smiling, hands extended, saying, "Hello, how are you?" in a pantomime of adulthood.

"Money, Money!" they say, "give me money!"

Sometimes nice younger boys will want to hold my hand. Sometimes they will yell, throw rocks, hit me with hands and plastic pipes. It can be maddening, to be mobbed by 10 or 15 boys aged 6 to 12, grabbed, hit, screamed at. One afternoon I lay alone in the apartment I share with several other international activists, listening to the sound of children's voices whirling like cyclone winds in the street outside. This vocal cacophony was occasionally punctuated by staccato gunfire from Israeli soldiers in the guard towers on the perimeter of Rafah. Was it my imagination or did the kids' voices strike a panicked note after each series of gunshots? In any case, there are no salamanders in Rafah. The streets and empty lots serve as playgrounds, and they are more often than not lifeless urban terrain with plastic trash instead of rotten logs, a far cry from the environment of my own backwoods American childhood.

Shebab means loosely 'Youth' and this term is applied to adolescent boys and young men. Like many boys in this age group anywhere, a lot of the shebab are looking for trouble. Many of them are also wonderful human beings. Technically Mohammed is a shebab, although his manner is exceptionally calm. He is 20, but if he had not told me his age I would have guessed 25.

Perhaps it is the fact that 10 of his close friends have died in the past the two years which makes him wise rather than simply intelligent. Perhaps he would be wise even if he was born into suburban New Hampshire; some people are at 20 regardless of the circumstances under which they live. In any case, Mohammed arrives at 10 with a quiet Arabic-speaking speaking friend. The three of us sit in the apartment and talk until midnight.

* * *

Today was the first day of Eid, a 3-day Islamic holiday which commemorates the koranic story in which Ibrahim is asked by Allah to sacrifice his son. As Mohammed

on thick green stalks, fifty to a stalk like chandeliers in the markets on Sea street, male friends call each other habibi and sometimes walk hand in hand, taxis cost two shekels, and occupation has taught the adults how to wait patiently while enduring suffering.

Rachel, I have Rafah Syndrome and when I return to the USA I am afraid no one will understand it.

Rachel, I walked to the place where you were crushed and left a purple crystal given to me by Sheldon, who fought with the USA Army Airborne during the first gulf war. When I met him he was applying for a bouncer job at a Hell's Angels bar. He pointed to the bar and said, "It's all love here." Maybe he pointed at the world, not the bar; either way Sheldon taught me everything about saving money on at the Pilot truck stop on Indian Springs road and I am waiting for the truth of his statement to flash like a naked lightbulb wired outside the Block J tent in the minds of billions of soldiers and office workers and politicians and housewives and laid off factory workers and resistance fighters and supermodels and children and nursing students and stock owners and the graveyard clerk at the Unocal station at the intersection of Harrison and Division in Olympia. . . when left I that crystal by Alice's flowers in the Destroyer's playground outside Hy Salam, a tank was parked 500 meters away and some small boys walked out toward me. They raised their hands in the air like we do to show that we have no weapons.

Rachel, Mohammed asked me if people in the USA understand the term "martyr." I said it means someone who dies for something larger than self, for something sacred. We agreed about this. Here it means someone who is killed by occupation, whether they are a child, a fighter, or an old woman. The Palestinian people belong to this place, they grow out of the land like the olive trees and the delicate red poppies which flower in early spring. This rooted history of land and people is something that tumbleweed mutt immigrant travelers from America like me don't know, I mean really know in our bones and hair and fingers. Sha'hiid is anyone who dies because the land is occupied and the people are abused by foreign soldiers. Already in the second intifada there are over 2000. Two others were killed in Rafah the day you died.

You, Seshan, Ali, and Tahir were all given the terrible gift of a symbolic death, the cause of which is as obvious as the Salahadin tower which looms like a sculpture of Satan over busy Salahadin street and the tank parked outside Hy Salam.

Rachel, Mohammed said, "You are playing with your blood." This is a threat which means roughly, "I'll kill you." But Krik and I both know that all of us, all the strugglers for peace, are playing with our blood. It is the only card we can play in this game we are caught in. Either you play with your own blood, or you play with someone else's. I prefer to play with my own.

the dead face which sagged against my arm as I lifted your shoulders and two Red Crescent workers lifted your legs as we removed your body from a Palestinian metal box and laid it on an Israeli stretcher on wheels. . . and the invisible ghost of your own child's face which I never saw and whose eyes never watched a tank fire machine guns at a house and whose lips never said with fear, anger, and awe, "Debaba! Debaba!" which means "Tank! Tank!"

Rachel, I barely knew you and yet I framed your work and death here: arranged and reserved your plane ticket to Tel Aviv, drove with you 16 mad hours to San Francisco to catch airplanes, opened the doors of my parent's house for you, rode taxis with you our first time into the West Bank and Gaza. . . then knelt beside you as you lay mortally wounded. All I could do was go into trance and feel your spirit slipping away, it's angelic form receding in my mind's eye as I sent all my attention and love to you. I did not know then whether to ease your death or grasp at your soul and try to pull you back into the physical world. I only tried to be there and draw the hurt from you into myself while sending the life from myself into you.

Rachel, I made it my mission to ensure that you reached Rafah safely then two months later rode from Rafah to Tel Aviv with your body in ambulances only to be locked outside the gates of the National Forensic Medical Center in the dark as grey bats the size of robins dived and fluttered between ornamental urban trees in the orange glow of sodium carbide streetlights. The Gaza branch of the Palestinian authority wanted to parade your body in the street and the U.S. government pressured Al Najjar hospital to send it to the nearest border crossing and hand it over to the Israeli army and the IOF soldiers at Shufa crossing forced Alice, Krik, and I to wait for two hours while a journalist from Ha'aratz badgered us with questions and Palestinian soldiers served us tea and dinner.

Rachel, when we walked out with Joe and Stephan and Jenny to bring back Tamir's body from the Destroyer's playground between Egypt and Rafah soldiers hiding behind gun barrels and bulletproof bunker walls shot the earth around us, armored bulldozers razed an olive orchard, but I never thought that you would die beneath the steel claws of an Israeli-American war machine.

Tamir was a fighter and he died fighting, a Kalashnikov clip beside him.

You were a woman who loved Pat Benatar and put up with too much shit tits and died in front of a home you slept in to protect. Maybe you died of Rafah Syndrome which Simple Krik describes like this: "After you've been in Rafah long enough, you don't know what to do except stand in front of bulldozers."

Rachel, I am in love with Rafah because an eight-year-old boy risked his life to unhook barbs of razor wire from my pants when I was trapped by a bulldozer in the Destroyer zone. I am in love with Rafah because here the bananas hang in clumps

tells the story, Ibrahim trusts Allah and agrees to willingly sacrifice his beloved son because he understands that human souls only dwell temporarily in physical bodies. We come from Allah and after death we return to Allah; therefore if god asks for our bodies, it is right to give them. God, not humanity, creates bodies.

The celebration of Eid centers around slaughtering animals and sharing meat. Last night cows were tied in the street; this morning they were killed and the meat was distributed to families. Much of the meat goes to poor families who cannot normally afford to buy meat. People eat and visit their extended families. It is a holiday, similar in ways to Thanksgiving in the U.S.

Nonetheless, I was slightly shocked to look out the window this morning and see five men and boys hacking energetically at the skinned carcass of a steer with knives and cleavers. All those red muscles sprawled on the paving stones, right there under the open sky in the shadow of monolithic grey apartment blocks. . . and then to step through rivulets of crimson blood en route to wash my clothes. Some vegetarian internationals were saddened and repulsed by this spectacle, but I was intrigued and impressed. I like eating meat, and I believe that it is good to know and understand the consequences of your actions. The consequence of eating meat is that animals must be killed-- it is better to do this openly, while remembering an educational myth, or to hide the killing in factories, fatten the animals in cramped feedlots, pump their bodies full of hormones and antibiotics, then kill them secretly with machines?

I would rather see carcasses hanging flayed in a meat market and blood in the street than eat the sickly flesh of prepackaged frozen hamburger patties and remain docile and ignorant of chickens whose beaks are burned off and who live out their entire lives in tiny cages stacked like urban apartments then are killed by underpaid factory workers on an assembly line of mechanical knives. Mohammed also explains that there are Islamic laws which dictate how to kill animals properly-- quickly, respectfully, while acknowledging the divine gifts of life, bodies, and food.

Like many Americans, I am as ignorant of Islam as I am of Palestinian culture. I have practicing Jewish friends in the U.S., but I never knew a real live Muslim before I came to Palestine. Now I am immersed, surrounded, permeated by this religion. Arabic is rich with references to Allah. They hang in conversation like the calligraphic Koran texts which decorate homes and offices here. God is audible everywhere: Insha'allah (god willing) can be and often is included in any statement of future plans. There is no English equivalent. The Insh'allah factor allows for the possibility of unpredictable events that change plans, not the least of which are the effects of occupation. It implies an understanding that we are not the absolute masters of our own destiny. Ya'allah means "oh my god." Ham d'allah means "thanks be to god." This is what you say after you finish eating a meal. It is also what you say when someone asks you how you are. 'Thanks to god, I am good, I am happy.' Or, you can simply say Ham d'allah.

Mohammed once said, "For the good and for the bad, ham'dallah." He is wise.

It is as easy to fall in love with a language where hello (salaam aleekum) and goodbye (ma'a salaam) both contain wishes for peace as it is to fall in love with the grace and passion of young Palestinian men who call each other habibi al Haj. Habibi means someone you love, a term of endearment; al haj is someone who has been on a pilgrimage to Mecca; habibi al haj is something like sanctified friendship. The shebab gesture with an open hand to their hearts when greeting and sometimes carry Kalashnikov rifles... and far too often end up starting out from within the red, white and green borders of sha'hiid posters. But this is too much too fast. If you have not been to Palestine, then you probably don't know about sha'hiid posters.

Sha'hiid roughly translates as martyr. Every man, woman, and child, fighter or ambulance driver, who dies as a result of occupation is sha'hiid. Sha'hiid posters are usually in color. They show a photo of the deceased person. Often they are made by one of the Palestinian political factions, either because the deceased belonged to that faction because his or her family has no money to make posters or because the political parties want to use the dead to legitimize themselves or all of the above. These posters can be found on walls all over town. They show men and boys of all ages, but although women die as a result of occupation, few get posters.

In sha'allah there will be no new sha'hiid in Rafah tonight.

* * *

II. Jihad

No word is more mistranslated, misused, misunderstood, and twisted out of context than 'jihad'. Many American newspapers, magazines, radio and television programs translate jihad as "holy war," as the Islamic equivalent of 'crusade.' Using the term in this context perpetuates the popular fallacy that Islam is a religion of war, as Mohammed puts it "a religion spread by the sword." Of course every religion has as many faces as it has believers, and Islam can show a Kalashnikov and suicide bomb face, just as Judaism can show an Uzi, armored home-demolishing bulldozer and invading tank face, and Christianity can display a nuclear missile, apache helicopter, and F-16 face. But the actual sacred text of these religions, all three of which are deeply rooted in the land called Palestine and Israel, value peace over war.

A more accurate translation of Jihad would be "community service," not "holy war." It is a general concept which has many specific applications. Mohammed tells me it comes from a root word meaning "effort" or "action." He explains, "if you find a stone blocking the road, and move it out of the way so people can pass, that is jihad... or if you help an old person cross the street." Jihad is action in the service of Allah and community. This action can take many forms, one of which is to defend or preserve the community by fighting.

III. Sha'hiid

Later in Jenin I see more blood in the street, but this time it is from a young man

and spoke these last words: "My back is broken." Everyone understands the difference between bananas hanging in outdoor stalls, oranges in bins on the sidewalk, pita fresh from the morning oven, and the machine gun slits in the turret of the tank parked outside Doctor Samir's house today in Hy Salaam. Rachel, El Salvador Blanca, why did you have to die such a horrible and gruesome death in order to clarify such a simple concept?

Rachel, for two months now I have struggled to understand the meaning of martyr and the meaning of sacrifice, two ancient words buried and hidden from me in Christian dogma, postmodern relativity, and the general narcotic haze of doubt symptomatic of Euro-American spiritual malaise, yet I wish you had not died and taught me these definitions.

Rachel the truth is half the reason I returned to Rafah is because you were here and told me I was both missed and welcome. The truth is you reminded me of a sister I lost or never quite found. The truth is after Tel Aviv sweetheart anarchists, endless rowdy boys and coffee and tanks and routine harassment at roadblocks in Jenin and nearly getting struck by lightning on a roof in the rain and losing faith in depression and finding it in a field of wild mustard, a thunderstorm, solitude, and the Mediterranean sea, I came back to Rafah and spoke with you about two children from Yibna and a consensus meeting.

"This meeting was difficult," I said, "because we are trained to believe that the way to get things done is by competing with each other. It's a product of a competitive, capitalist society and maybe patriarchy."

"Yes, patriarchy," you said.

Rachel, I wanted to have a real fucking conversation with you when I returned to Rafah but now you are dead.

Rachel, I am sick of patriarchy and it is high time we have visible international heroines.

Rachel, your faces are burned into the cells of my memory forever: the sunshine face which I first saw at a cafe in Olympia where I suspected you of being slightly corrupted by the power beauty possesses over those who desire it; the determined face that peered out from inside the cloth of your mandeel after one week in Rafah; the face of a woman screaming a demand for justice at Allah and Jehovah and the world and anyone who will listen which surfaced amid the pages of a Hebrew newspaper given to me by a Gush Shalom activist long after the demonstration at which you burned paper drawings of American flags handed to you by Rafah children but did not burn paper drawings of Israeli flags because they depict the star of David which is a sacred symbol of Judaism; the unbroken young face falling forward as your legs were caught beneath the bulldozer's blade; the bruised face with bleeding gashed lips and unseeing eyes which emerged from beneath the bulldozer gasping for breath while I was paralyzed with shock, rage, and sorrow;

Rachel, the boys are so much nicer now that you are dead and the crew of internationals have walked these streets for a month in my absence and I don't have to traverse that terrible street from Ahmad's tower in Yibna where once I saw a kid sitting on the curb burning plastic bags and where all of us were repeatedly assaulted by children. The boys are so much nicer now that I accept them as an integral part of the street ecosystem of Rafah, now that I look them in the eyes and say, "ana ismeec William. Shu ismek?" They only throw stones and say "Shalom" when they want attention and I ignore them.

Rachel, what kind of sick fucking world can turn the Hebrew word for peace into an insult and place it in the mouths of children?

Rachel, I see the need for peace on your face now that it cries out from hundreds of glossy posters. The cartoon in your journal shows a woman saying, "I have a dove of peace in my head," to which man replies, "shit tits." Often in life it is shit tits which obscure the dove of peace, and although this is real it is also unfortunate.

I wrote these lines on your sha'hiid poster: "Rachel was a girl who came to stop the tanks. She was a victim of the Israeli Occupation force, killed by an armored bulldozer designed to demolish Palestinian homes." But I know that although the USA army ordered a shipment of the same militarized Caterpillar bulldozers for use in Iraq, you did not come to stop the tanks, you came to live with the people and work for peace and justice. The tanks appeared later, and at first they were hidden in darkness beyond the wreckage of homes. That night we arrived with a shared cell phone, bags of clothes and assorted human junk, dreams, connected by the tenuous link of common work and traveler's conversation. We slept in the Block J tent, pitched between spectral grey apartment blocks emptied of human life by the gunmen and the Destroyers. A nearby tank fired machine gun bursts and tracers low overhead, a bare lightbulb hung outside like a charm against bullets, and we were nervous and afraid.

Another sha'hiid poster, made by saintly broke Rafah people, asks "Why was Rachel killed? Israel is killing the peace activities and kills Rachel. Rachel has been killed by USA weapon and support." It calls us "the Strugglers for Peace." Children tear your image from city walls in order to carry a piece of you home.

Rachel, we must cry for you not only because you are gone but because you have illustrated how painful is the birth of dreams, the truth that we must suffer and die in order to be reborn in memory and the future, and the possibility that opposing the death machine logic of empire can plant seeds which grow with vegetable endurance toward peace and understanding.

Rachel, perhaps only the bodhisattvas on this earth understand peace, but everyone understands the difference between the hulking armored bulldozer which killed you and the flowers we placed on the raw beige dust where you lay with your torn face

named Seshan, rather than a cow. Human blood and cow's blood look exactly the same once they are removed from their respective bodies. Seshan was a high school senior, a football star, and a good student. Ironically, the name of his high school is Salaam school-- the school of peace. He was not a fighter. This is obvious from his sha'hiid poster: he has a gentle, student's face and wears a sweater with a letter A spread across the front. Fighters pose with guns, dressed up in paramilitary hero drag. They are proud of the fact that they fight, and, in death, do not have to hide it.

I am of two minds regarding fighters. Undoubtedly they are given the terrible gift of a warrior's death. When you are prevented from going to visit your grandmother by armed foreign soldiers even though she lives only 5 miles from your house, when your kid brother is crippled for life by machine gun fire from a tank parked on the main street of your town, there is no doubt about what you are fighting for.

Perhaps it is necessary to further illustrate the environment which produces so-called suicide bombers and armed resistance fighters, which are not synonymous. There are bombers who go inside Israel and blow them selves up, for example the recent bombing of an Egged bus in Haifa. These bombings often kill civilians. There are fighters who shoot at Israeli soldiers inside occupied Palestine. These are radically different strategies and radically different actions. The resistance fighters who operate within the West Bank and Gaza generally do not kill civilians, since they fight against an occupying army within their own borders. The same cannot be said of the Israeli Occupation Force.

Here are two examples from Jenin of the environment which creates armed resistance:

1.) Doctor Khalil Suleyman, a respected and loved physician who taught at a nearby university and worked with volunteers at the local Red Crescent Society (the Arabic Red Cross), was killed last march. He was riding in an ambulance, clearly marked as such, with flashing red lights on top and everything. The ambulance rushed into an area of Jenin refugee camp occupied by Israeli soldiers during an IOF invasion. Palestinians were wounded there, and the ambulance was responding to rescue them. An IOF soldier fired a grenade from a launcher attached to an M-16, incinerating the ambulance and killing the doctor. The remains of the ambulance sit in a field outside the Red Crescent building. It is a burned, twisted, gutted wreck.

2.) Seen from a nearby hilltop, Jenin refugee camp resembles a concrete doughnut. In the center of the camp is an area of bare dirt. Before April 2001, this empty hole was packed as thick with houses as the rest of the camp is. All these houses were demolished in an attack which included F-16s, Apache helicopters, shelling from tanks, and armored bulldozers. Some fighters were in the refugee camp. The IOF strategy of attack was to destroy all the houses in the area where the fighters holed up. This rendered over a thousand people homeless. One bulldozer operator, who received an award for working 16 hours without stopping, commented later in an interview: "They should thank me. Now they have a soccer field."

* * *

Seshan was shot through the heart by an Israeli sniper on the 1 year anniversary of Doctor Khalil's death, when a tank and two jeeps rolled into Jenin. One of Seshan's classmates stated that he spoke with Seshan 5 minutes before his death. Seshan was on his way to a private English lesson, carrying his books and his pen. He asked about an upcoming test.

There is an apparent connection between sha'hid and animal sacrifice. The death of cattle on Eid is celebrated because it feeds the people. The dead sha'hid are honored with posters, ceremonies, and public funerals. Sha'hid means martyr and a martyr is someone who sacrifices his or her life for the Sacred-- in this case manifested as Islam, Palestine, and the community. Keep in mind that this society is, for the most part, deeply religious and mostly Muslim. Islam is a unifying force in the community. In desperate times, people naturally turn to the spiritual seeking reasons to live, because the mysteries of faith hold a hope that transcends physical suffering. This same faith can be attributed to an ideology, such as humanism or socialism; in any case people commonly seek salvation and meaning in the belief that they are part of a larger whole, that their work in the world contributes to a continuous human story which expands beyond the narrow confines of their individual lives. Thus one can see sha'hid as people who sacrifice their lives for the sacred. This quality which gives meaning to life fulfills a human need as vital as hunger; to die a meaningful death is to feed the spirit of the people.

At first I was impressed and disturbed by the machismo posturing of fighters posing with guns and ammunition. While walking in Jenin Refugee camp, I met a young boy who kissed on of the fighter sha'hid posters. "What kind of role model is this?" I thought. Since I have met some young men who are fighters, their condition seems simply tragic. For example, Ahkmed, who is in his early 20s. He's the nicest kid you could ever meet, always smiling, radiant in his knit hat and brown leather coat.

Walking with an international activist from Sweden, I meet him in the street. He greets us. We shake hands and walk together to the internet cafe. Since he trusts us, he lifts his sweater to reveal a belt of shiny rifle bullets. He even jokes about how much the bullets could be sold for in Sweden. Linus, who knows him better than I do, later says, "He wants to die." Chances are he will be dead or in jail within two years. It's a damn shame, a waste of a young, healthy human being bursting with passion and love.

As an American, I am implicated in this hybrid war-police operation-colonization-genocide. The U.S. government supports and funds the Israeli military, and U.S. companies manufacture many of the weapons used to enforce occupation.

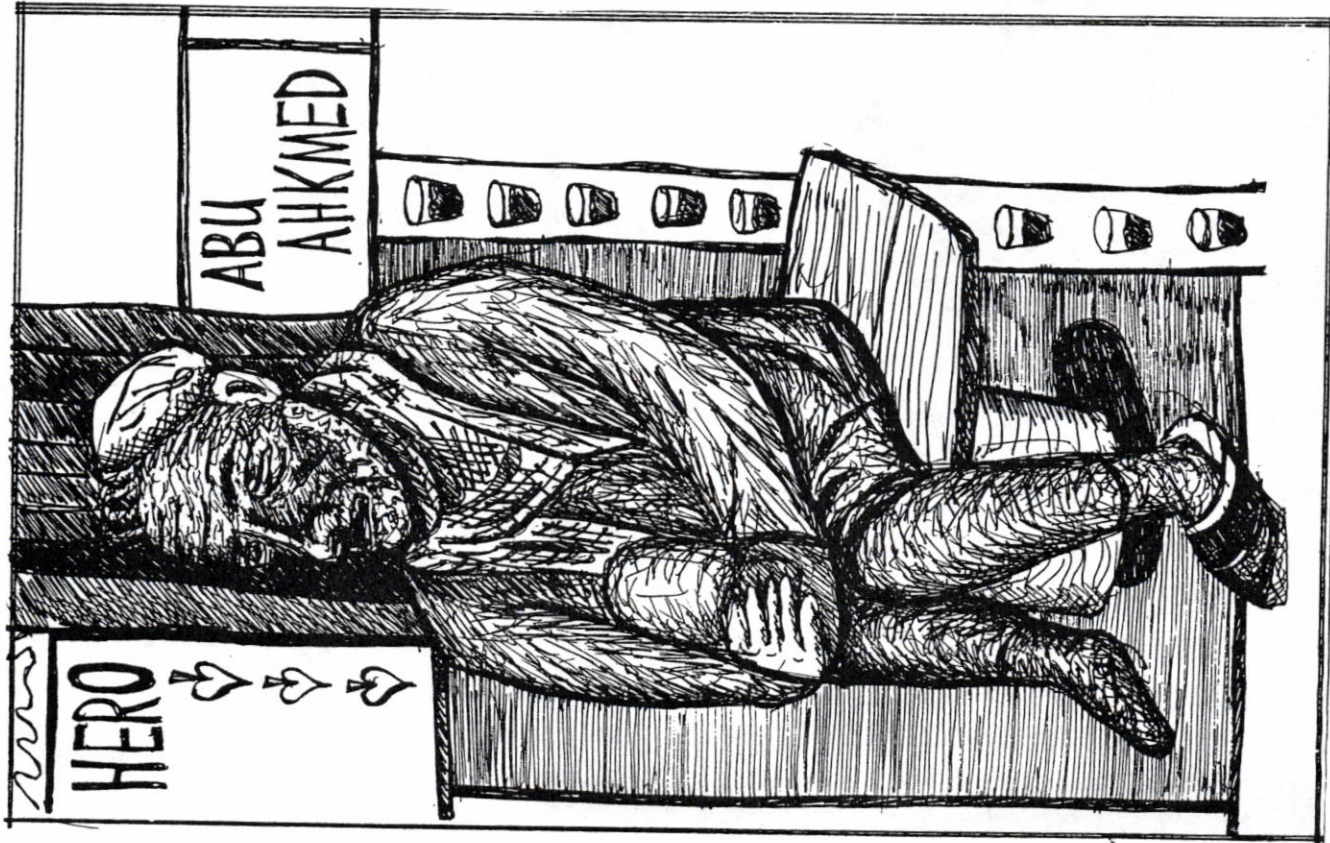
As an empathic human being, I understand what drives the fighters to fight and even the suicide bombers to kill and die. But the same empathy leaves me caught in the middle, unable to simplify reality into good guys and bad guys. The condition of being Israeli or Jewish is no more reason for death than is the condition of being

Sha'hid El Salvador Blanca and the Strugglers for Peace

Rachel, death has transformed you into a window through which foreigners can see Rafah and Rafah can see the kind face of the white world. You have died to move history and I honor you as a friend, as a companion and ally in the eternal work, which is called revolution or the struggle for human rights, freedom, peace, justice, and survival, which is called fixing the broken world or evolution or activism or the search for truth... you have been blessed with a death that connects people across great distances and differences.

Rachel, thousands mourn you, yet still the deaths of Seshan, Ali, Ahkmed, Nuha, Mohammed and Khalil are obscured by race, ethnicity, and religion. This is a crime of censorship, yet even I could not decipher the patterns of Seshan's blood rippling over the street in Jenin until you died. He was 18 years old, shot in the heart during a special forces operation aimed at a fighter in an internet cafe' blocks away. The Israeli army said he held a molotov. They said you jumped in front of a bulldozer and they said your body was crushed by the debris of a demolished house. They lie. Seshan carried a book and pen en route to an English lesson and I watched you stand then sit to block a bulldozer which approached slow and heavy as the sheer historical momentum of violence required to build empires, wealth, and nation-states on foundations of genocide, enslavement, and poverty. Ali was six years old when a sniper shot him from a distant tower. Ahkmed died slim hours after you and he was next in line for a sha'hid poster at the print shop in Khan Younis. He was not a fighter; he was only a man. The catalogue of sha'hid stretches on and on: Doctor Khalil Suleyman incinerated in his ambulance while rushing to the aid of wounded people in Jenin refugee camp, Nuha Sweidan, nine months pregnant, killed during a house demolition in Gaza... how long must we feed the Destroyers with human blood? The Destroyers do not care if the blood is Palestinian, Israeli, or American as long as it continues to flow from torn human bodies.

Rachel, I know that you came to Rafah intentionally to work for peace and that most of the people who die from occupation simply live here, but still I call you El Salvador Blanca. That name was given to you by a sarcastic co-worker in America who heard of your trip to Palestine. It is a joke, a compliment, and a reminder of racist imperialism. At least you could chose to come to Rafah or stay in Olympia and live comfortable, only occasionally disturbed by the telltale sound of gunfire issuing from a television set. That is where wars and occupations happen in middle class America: on television. Everybody knows a college education is a ticket to the middle class, and we both came here with that ticket neatly folded inside our American passports. The children of Rafah have no American passports and no keys to the gated suburb of American money comforts. This is why I have decided to speak with them and memorize their unique faces although in the past I only saw them as a churning sea of tormented brown childhood liable to throw rocks at my head and steal my cellular phone.



Palestinian or the condition of being American and therefore associated, willingly or not, with military and economic imperialism bent on global domination. Thus I seek to understand and to act, rather than to judge.

* * *

Seshan's funeral is brief and dramatic. His body, wrapped in a Palestinian flag and wearing a kofia, is carried through the street in a public procession. There is no coffin; the body rests on a stretcher, face visible to onlookers. As the march begins, fighters shoot in the air. Children carry the black and yellow banners of Islamic Jihad, the green and white banners of Hamas, and the black and white banners of Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, the militant wing of Fateh.

The funeral procession takes off at a fast walk, stopping once for 30 minutes at a mosque where people go inside and pray. During the march, the air is charged with residual violence, grief, fear, and anger. At the cemetery, the atmosphere changes somewhat-- people become quiet, stand in silence, or recite prayers. Seshan's funeral is a mixture of politics, militance, religion, and mourning. The separation between the public, depersonalized space of political conflict and the private space for grief is always an illusion; this becomes obvious when fighters carry Kalashnikovs, grade school kids wave Hamas flags, old men go into a mosque to pray, and a bereaved father cries under an olive tree, all at the funeral of a civilian student shot by Israeli soldiers in a tank parked on main street.

In the United States, laws mandate that every body be embalmed, a toxic process in which the corpse is saturated with chemical sludge. For open coffin funerals, the face of the deceased is often painted in order to give it life-like flesh tones. Of course the companies which make embalming fluid and coffins are big business. In contrast, Seshan was shot, publicly mourned, and buried in an 8 hour period. Walking back from the funeral, I see small footprint-sized blood stains remain on the street where he died.

* * *

In the koranic/ biblical/ torahic story wherein Ibrahim is asked by god to sacrifice his son Isaac, Ibrahim and Isaac both agree to the sacrifice. Mohammed, the nursing student and scholar from Rafah, interprets this to mean that they understand the transitory, earthbound nature of physical bodies. This is a lesson we learn and relearn every time someone close to us dies. Whether you are religious or not, the sight of the dead body of someone you know begs the questions, "Where did the life that animated that person go? Is there something vital and enduring beyond physical matter and individual perception?"

Perhaps there is something in the ongoing evolution of the human species which still demands blood sacrifice. Perhaps there are lessons which we still must learn from

killing and being killed.

All I ask is that the blunt reality of occupation specifically and globalization generally be exposed. Once you understand people who are different from yourself, you may choose your attitude toward them freely. Either consider them enemies and use your deeper understanding of them as ammunition to fight them, or work toward mutual reconciliation. But do not delude yourself with the ancient lie that that you are human and they are inhuman.

* * *

At Seshan's funeral, I sit next to a small boy who wears a bullet around his neck on a chain. He sings prayers in a sweet, melodic voice. Palm fronds lie, bleached by sun, between gravestones carved from Palestinian marble. Mint and flowers grow around the graves. Bullets are like seashells or driftwood here: ubiquitous, an aspect of the local environment.

IV. Jaysh Israeli

At a checkpoint, an Israeli soldier approaches Tobias, Linus, and I. He holds an Israeli newspaper. He is burning with the need to explain why he is here in an armored personnel carrier at a road crossing used daily by grade school children and teachers. Behind him, 1 kilometer distant, Abba school stands surrounded by the blue-green spires of ornamental juniper trees. He opens the paper to display a color centerfold of carnage caused by a recent Egged bus bombing in Haifa. Egged buses are often targeted by suicide bombers. They are a major form of transportation for Israeli soldiers, but are also public buses which civilians ride. Of course civilians who ride Egged buses are often working class, and the line between soldier and civilian blurs in a nation where military service is mandated by law.

The soldier at the checkpoint lives in a settlement. He says it is his duty to be here to protect Israel. He claims that the children in Abba school will grow up to be suicide bombers. Some of them may; others will grow up to be doctors or barbers; right now they are only children. When I tell him about 6 year old Ali who was shot in Rafah while on his way home from school, the soldier replies, "As soon as the cameras come on, they push the children out into the gunfire."

His attitude is clearly racist, yet he is not a monster. "The soldiers come here because of these photos," he says, pointing at pictures of dismembered bodies in the paper. He's right. Soldiers do come and feel justified in enforcing occupation because of one-sided, sensationalist journalism and ethnocentric thinking.

Israeli newspapers show pictures of Israelis killed by suicide bombers. Palestinian newspapers show pictures of Palestinians killed by Israeli army invasions.

V. The People

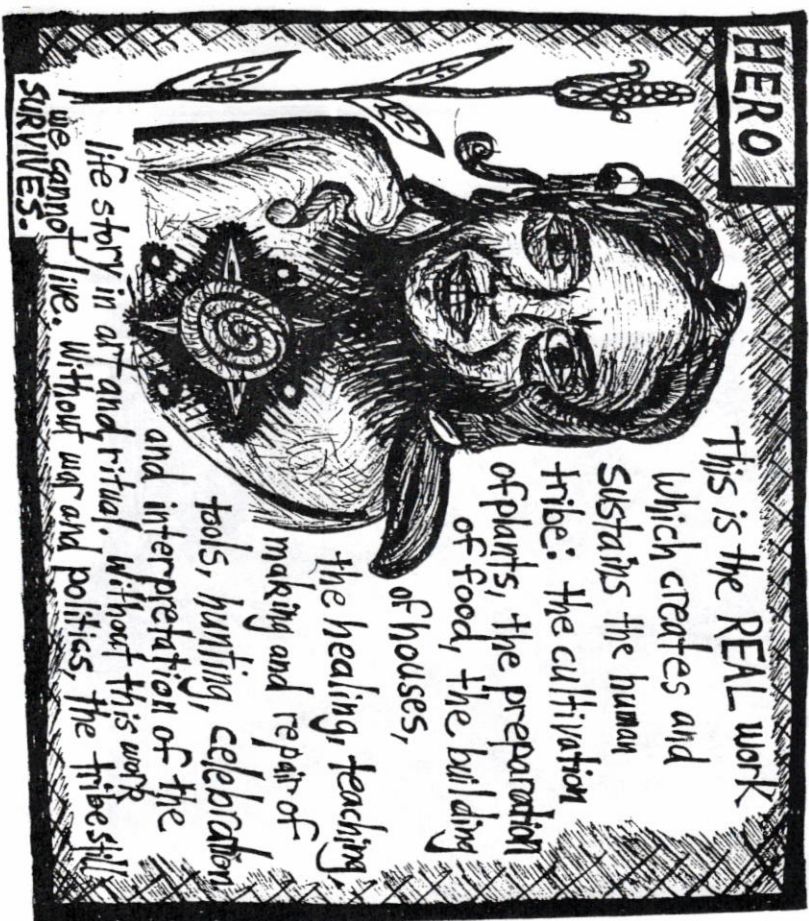
Everyone is a victim of circumstances and everyone wants peace.

Alice, Greg, and I rushed to where Rachel lay. She said, "My back is broken." Alice and Greg checked for vital signs, made sure that her airway was clear, and that she was breathing. I knelt on the ground with my hands on her shoulder. They talked to her. Alice said, "We love you. Imagine that you are back in America, in a wheelchair, giving all of the talks you want to give."

Samir Abu Kareem, who watched all of this from the upstairs porch of his house, called an ambulance. Then he rushed out and joined us with Rachel. The ambulance arrived. Greg, Alice, and I rode in the ambulance with Rachel to Al Najjar hospital. Rachel died in the Emergency room there fifteen minutes after we arrived.

There were two bulldozers in Hy Salaam that day. The driver of one would not risk injuring activists, and always stopped when we sat down in front of her machine. (It is possible to see into the cabs of the bulldozers; one of the internationals noticed and told me that this driver was a woman.) The other repeatedly endangered our lives, nearly killed me, and killed Rachel.

After Rachel was crushed, the soldiers in the tank and bulldozers did not get out of their machines or attempt to help in any way



honking horns and blowing smoke out of the tank. One international made eye contact with a bulldozer driver, and the driver acknowledged this with hand gestures.

Because we repeatedly blocked them by sitting and standing in front of the bulldozers, the soldiers changed their tactics and began driving parallel, rather than perpendicular, to the edge of Rafah. Three times ISM activists were nearly injured, but each time the driver stopped at the last instant. Nick almost crushed against a concrete wall. Alice's leg was caught under a bulldozer blade. I sat down in front of a bulldozer when it was 20 meters away. It approached at about 5 miles per hour. I did not move. The driver knocked me over with the blade, pushed me a few meters across the ground, and wedged me between a mound of dirt and a pile of razor wire. I could not move. If he had driven forward only one more foot, I would have been impaled on the wire; another meter and I would have been totally buried, impaled, and probably killed. Joe and Alice rushed over. They undid the straps of my backpack, which was buried beneath me, trapping my arms. They helped unhook the razor wire from my clothes. A young Palestinian boy, perhaps 10 years old, ran out and helped unhook the wire from my pants. This happened in an open area, within clear view of the tank. The boy's action put him at risk of being shot, and he knew this. Children watched from the relative safety of nearby buildings. They were so angered that, 15 minutes later, they threw a smoke bomb. It flew only a few meters and landed far from the tank and bulldozers. The explosion was the size of a fire cracker.

Other activists urged me to leave the scene but I refused.

The bulldozers continued to work, destroying an unfinished building, a palm and some olive trees, then advancing on an olive orchard surrounded by a cinder block wall. I climbed onto this wall. A bulldozer crushed a garden shed attached to this wall. Nick, Tom, and Greg climbed onto the rubble of the shed. Alice joined me on the wall. The bulldozer backed away. Alice and I climbed down from the wall and walked toward Rachel. She stood alone, near Samir Abu Kareem's house. He is a local pharmacist. She stayed at his house several times. A bulldozer approached her at about 5 miles per hour. The machine was about 25 meters away and directly in front of her. She waved her arms at the driver. At this point it was approximately 5:00.

Concerned that she was alone, I approached quickly. She sat down as the bulldozer advanced. The churning wave of dirt pushed by the bulldozer began to cover her knees. She tried to move backward, then to stand up. She lost her balance as the dirt engulfed her. She struggled and climbed in this wave of dirt, then fell. I continued to walk toward her. I passed directly in front of and about 8 meters away from the bulldozer as she fell. I began to yell, "Don't kill my friend!" and to wave my arms. The bulldozer continued. First her legs were caught under the blade, then the machine drove over her completely. I continued toward her. As the machine crushed her, I stood beside it, about ten feet away. I waved my arms and yelled at the driver, "You are killing my friend!" When her entire body was beneath the cab and between the treads of the bulldozer, the driver stopped. Then he reversed and backed away.

Salah Ha Din Street

Another child gestures as if he were holding a rifle, then points down Salah Ha Din street.

"Tak! Tak! Tak!" he says, "Dangerous!"

He gestures for me to put away my camera. Bright sun glares in the midday street. Around a corner, out of sight of the deadly Salah Ha Din tower, vendors display oranges, bananas, potatoes, cucumbers, the green and gold and orange of life-giving food piled on outdoor tables. I understand that this boy is telling me that photographing the tower may irritate the Israeli soldiers who sit invisible behind its tinted bulletproof windows, causing them to shoot.

Ten minutes previous, while speaking with a local man named Hisham, I heard machine gun fire from the direction of the tower. Perhaps the boy's fears are realistic. Can the soldiers discern from 500 yards away that my skin is white and I am American, not Palestinian? What measure of protection does racism give me, anyway? How easy would it be, if they shot me, for the Israeli commanders to offer an official apology and state that the soldiers mistook me for "an armed Palestinian terrorist"? How likely is it that the United States Government will brand me a "terrorist" simply for coming here to live, speak with, and try to help the ordinary people of Rafah? I do not know the answers to these questions.

I put away my camera and walk down Salah Ha Din street with two Palestinian youths. They look maybe 15 or 16 years old. One of them offers me a cigarette. I accept. They ask me the question I am asked every day, everywhere I go: "What's your name?"

As we walk, they point out bullet holes in shop doors. A city water tower nearby resembles the face of a smallpox survivor, scarred by the sickness of Occupation. An apartment building, still under construction, already bears a dense pattern of bullet marks. Hisham pointed out the building where he and his extended family live. Even though it is 1/4 mile away from Salah Ha Din tower, since it is taller than the surrounding buildings, one wall is shot up like a rural American road sign. Hisham and his family were, of course, inside the building while the bullets hit their walls. Perhaps that is one reason why houses in Rafah are built of poured concrete and cinder blocks: these materials can protect against sniper fire as well as sun, wind, and rain.

After two weeks in Rafah, the assaults of the Israeli Occupation Force have taken on an elemental quality. Since the Israeli soldiers virtually never emerge from their tanks, towers, armored personnel carriers, and armored bulldozers, it is easy to see the IOF as an impersonal death machine bent on the destruction of all things Palestinian. I never see human faces, only tank armor and gun muzzles. I know that

young men are inside the tanks, men with their own fragile bodies, their own hair and skin and eyes, minds and dreams--yet I awake at 4:00 A.M. to the sound of rockets exploding and wonder whose house has been demolished in Rafah, whose sons are being shell-shocked into taking up Kalashnikovs and joining the armed resistance.

This is not war. This is occupation. It is a deliberate and gradual annexation of Palestinian land and resources, a brutal use of military force to corral Palestinians into smaller and smaller areas, while the best land is taken for Israeli settlements and colonies. From Al Hasash, in Northwest Rafah, the red tile roofs of a nearby settlement are visible. About 3 miles of desert and 3 roads, one for tanks, one for army jeeps and trucks, and one for cars going to the settlement, divide those suburban-style houses from the urban jungle of Rafah. Any Palestinian who approaches the road will be shot.

Israel offers monetary and tax incentives to people who move to colonies. Most colonists are recent immigrants. The Israeli government plans to continue expansion of colonies until Palestine is geographically divided, riddled swiss-cheese style with Israeli land, so thoroughly occupied that it cannot unite as an independent people or nation. This is colonization: the appropriation of territory and resources at gunpoint, at missile point, at the crushing edge of an armored bulldozer's claw.

Jihan is a Palestinian woman who often accompanies and works with the ISM group. She is the only local woman who I have conversed with at any length, since there are strict traditional gender roles and a rigid separation of male/female (i.e. public/private) space here. Generally women remain distant, quiet figures, preparing food in kitchens or eating and sitting in separate rooms. Grown women never speak to me in the streets, although young sometimes girls approach, smiling and asking "what is your name?"

Jihan's father was killed while driving down Salah Ha Din street only a few months ago. He was shot in the head by a sniper. She was riding in the car when he was shot. He was an ordinary civilian father. It seems that virtually every man in Rafah has been shot or imprisoned. Omar, a quiet, friendly cab driver who often brings his young daughter along in the car while he is working, spent 12 years in an Israeli prison. Akhmed, a bearded 36 year old teacher who waxes philosophic and makes remarks like, "in religion--not in Islam or Christianity or Judaism, but in the soul of all religion, perhaps there is hope," lifts his pant leg to show the bullet scars on his calf.

Salah Ha Din tower is a massive boxy grey structure, sprouting antennae and wires from its roof and flanked by sections of rusty steel wall 30 feet high. It looks like the bridge of an aircraft carrier, somehow misplaced at the end of a city street. It is one of many sniper towers located on the South, East, and West borders of Rafah. All are manned by Israeli soldiers who regularly shoot, with or without provocation, into the city.

addition to their covered porch. Around 2:00 Alice and Nick went to scavenge nails from a nearby abandoned house. They returned and told me bulldozers had arrived. We all went out to investigate. Two Israeli Occupation Force (IOF) bulldozers and one small tank were moving in the militarized border zone between Hy Salaam and Brazil. A road runs along the border, connecting these two neighborhoods. The bulldozers drove perpendicular to this road, tearing up all the grass and weeds with their blades. One knocked over a telephone pole; the other crushed several olive trees and prickly pear cactus. Repeatedly they drove across the road, endangering electric lines.

City water pipes run under this road. A month earlier, I took part in two 'human shield' actions here. Water pipes were broken by a tank which drove into Brazil. Municipal Water Department workers could not repair the pipes because the IOF shot at them. We stood between the workers and the tank, and they fixed the pipes.

We knew five families who live within 100 meters of the border in this area, and whose houses may be targeted with demolition for this reason alone. House demolitions are done with extremely short notice, or without any warning at all. People have been killed when IOF bulldozers destroyed their houses while they were still inside. Usually the families can escape, but do not have time to save their possessions. The only advance warning of house demolition I heard was a lie: soldiers destroyed two houses, then said they would return the next morning and destroy the house next door. They did not return; it was an empty threat. Thus it is not possible to know the orders or intentions of bulldozer drivers, and whenever bulldozers are present they may attack houses.

On the 16th, we were seriously and logically concerned that bulldozers would destroy the houses of families we knew, who we had lived with.

Alice, Nick, and I called the other internationals in our group. A bulldozer approached an abandoned house. (The inhabitants of abandoned houses in this area moved because the IOF repeatedly machine-gunned their homes, and because the houses may be demolished at any time.) Nick and I went onto the porch of this house. The bulldozer came and started to crush the porch, but stopped because we did not move. Alice came and we all went onto the roof of this house. The bulldozer moved away toward Hy Salaam. Joe arrived and I went down and met him at an unfinished building in the militarized zone. A bulldozer came and began to crush this structure. We stayed there until Greg, Rachel, Tom, and Fuzz arrived. A bulldozer drove into the unfinished building and knocked over a 10-foot concrete column dangerously close to Nick. It reversed. He walked toward it. When it began to drive forward, he sat down in front of it. The driver stopped when the dirt pushed in front of the blade began to bury Nick's legs.

During the next 3 hours we repeatedly blocked the bulldozers by sitting and standing in front of them. We used a large banner and a megaphone to communicate our presence and identity to the soldiers. Rachel and Fuzz wore bright orange jackets with reflective tape on them. During most of the action, Rachel spoke through the megaphone, telling the soldiers that we were internationals from America, Britain, and Scotland, that we were unarmed and no threat to them, and demanding that they stop destroying Palestinian homes and infrastructure. The soldiers responded by

The old man was a gambler. He said he lost 100 shekels in the lottery. Then god called him on the telephone and said I was coming.

Two nights and a day of glorious solitude, drawing wild flowers, drinking Maccabee beer beside the Mediterranean Sea and throwing the crushed cans at crumbling Roman ruins. Everywhere in Palestine there is trash; it is part of the ecosystem. People drop candy bar wrappers in the street as if they were tossing banana peels in a jungle. I felt it my duty to litter Samson Delilah Park in the name of equality.

I read Teleny in bed, allowed my hear and body to move with natural grace, and, on the morning of the second day, jumped in the sea.

Later I stumbled onto a lot of service taxis and, having lost my American naivete' about prices, passed by an offer for a 50 shekel ride and piled into a van with eight Palestinian men. As a child of the American middle class, I expected all goods and services to come with an absolute, inflexible price tag attached. In reality, and in Palestine, cost is relative, changeable. Often there is a price for locals, and another price for foreigners. Since there are no numbered tags, one must either find a fair and generous businessman or know the local, unwritten price.

That old man in Ashqelon knew about numbers, chance, and relativity. Most importantly, he understood the value of discretion and privacy. Privacy becomes a commodity, a privilege beyond the means of all but the wealthiest Gazans, when population density collides with poverty and people are uprooted and stacked in concrete boxes.

Detailed Account of Events Leading to the Death of Rachel Corrie

March 16, 2003 was a sunny, mild day in Rafah. That morning the ISM group had a consensus meeting in our office, a second floor apartment downtown. Like most meetings run by consensus decision-making process, this one lasted too long and frustrated many of the people participating, but achieved a level of fairness impossible to attain via authoritarian, representative, or even democratic models for group process. A central discussion, began the previous day, continued: Rachel wanted to do an action. We discussed cleaning up Salahadin street, but we needed tools. . . maybe children would mob us, "celebrating you," as Mohammed put it. Some people needed to check out the scene and report back to the group. After the meeting we split up to do several different jobs. I went to the Hy Salaam neighborhood with Alice and Nick. There we helped a family build an

The tower looms deadly and ominous over rowdy kids, archaic Mercedes taxis, shopkeepers waiting in doorways, donkey carts, and women walking. This is what occupation looks like in Rafah: the technological sophistication of a nuclear superpower transformed into a depersonalized killing machine operated by restless, trigger-happy teenagers. This killing machine is aimed at Rafah, and does not distinguish between adults and children, or between members of Palestinian armed resistance and civilians.

Fucked-up Shit: Talking With Israeli Anarchist Kids

It was an international convergence, an Israeli-American peace summit, it was three boys in a room talking truth and politics, it was coffee and youth and brilliance and hunger. Of course that is why I liked the way Federico said "Fuck" with a Latin Jewish accent, "Fucked up," he said, and "Fuck that," and "It's no fucking question Israel should end settlements and get out of the entire West Bank and Gaza. That's the minimum, not the maximum."

Perhaps it is because his father, a member of an Argentinean Guerilla organization, was killed by the government's army that Federico understands how politics really should be discussed: with words that come from the gut, the genitals, the asshole, words loaded with desire and disgust and shock value. That's the kind of business politics is: a fucking shit business.

As a friend once told me, "All wars are wars of acquisition." Ain't that the truth, the simple primal secret disguised now in grey pinstripe suits woven from money and broken promises, camouflaged in army fatigues and decorated with gold stars and iron crosses, disguised in the rhetorical webs of academic historical bullshit routines. This is a fact everyone should know like they know the smell of their own armpits: wars, colonizations, and occupations are about fucking people over and taking their shit.



Refusenik stating his IDF number in court. I showed this picture to Laura in Rafah. She said there should be an Israeli flag instead of a star of David on the sword. She's right, but I copied the design—the scales of justice balancing on a sword superimposed over a shield—from a plaque over the door of the court in Tel Aviv.

Ashqelon

So-called mistakes are the pathways by which mystery enters. Ashqelon was a vortex of indecision; my plan was to head for Rafah direct, but the universe intervened to heal my tired soul with ocean and solitude. I rode an Egged bus from Jerusalem to Ashqelon then got lost on foot and walked a crazy circle around a football stadium. Then I walked four miles toward the highway, intent on hitchhiking to Erez, but could not resist ducking behind a row of jumpers into a field of wild grass and mustard flowers.

For the first time in over a month the landscape was devoid of people. The sun went down slow painting the sky violet, orange, gold. Clouds shifted slow, touched by invisible fingers of wind. Crows circled, perched in branches overhead, and greeted me like wild friendly jokers. Some time ago Karl, who picked me off the margin of a desert road and took good care of me for a day and a night, asked "Are you in heaven?" He explained, "Maybe heaven isn't a place, it's a state of mind." Or a field left alone for a season where weeds thrive as crows wheel careless of national boundaries or human laws.

Later, after dark, a thunderstorm raged and rain fell in brief, urgent barrages. Jagged lightning slashed the southern horizon, its raw electric galvanizing the atmosphere and illuminating the cold azure sky. There was nothing to do but sit under a tree and watch for an hour, then head for town in search of shelter.

I passed two shops and decided, randomly, to enter a third. An old man stood near the cash register. Immediately he accosted me in Hebrew. Turns out he had a room for rent. I asked to see the room. We walked and walked, that old man taking slow small steps and half-smiling under his umbrella in the rain and dark.

"Samson Delilah Park," he said, "three thousand years. Samson fought the lion with a bone. Samson Delilah Park."

We passed multi-story apartment blocks and continued along a road leading out of town. I began to wonder exactly where he was taking me, and for what purpose.

Samson Delilah Park. The old man led me to a tiny sandstone masonry building a few yards inside the park gate. He showed me a small room downstairs, rusty yellow metal door, outside bathroom, keys buried inside a plastic bag, illustrated children's books in Hebrew telling the story of Samson. I gave him 50 shekels and he was gone forever from my life. For a while I heard him upstairs in his small room full of books and record players and stacks of antique junk. The next morning he was gone. I decided to stay another night, and slipped money under the door upstairs.

Nescafe' and Satvagraha (thank you John Lennon)

What the world needs now is Instant Karma that comes in a cheap glass container with a free mug shrink-wrapped to a cardboard carton which contains both free gift mug and bottle of blunt powdered consequences. Just like Nescafe', which, as Salahadin tells me, is advertised in Israel as "The miracle coffee." Even through Salahadin goes sad-eyed and quiet when I ask him about nonviolent resistance, saying "Ah yes, Satvagraha. . ." as if it were some lost love of childhood, forever gone, moved to Cairo beyond the Green Line and the Israeli army, shot by a sniper while trying to rescue a wounded child in the refugee camp, bulldozed while inhabiting the spirit of an ancient olive tree. . . although conversation drifts and we never again speak of Satvagraha. . . *everyone is awed by Nescafe'.*

When Linus mentions Jabu Shabir, the old Palestinian socialist party, Yosef replies, "In the past we needed Jabu Shabir. Now maybe we need Islamic Jihad." But what we really need is Instant Karma.

Instant Karma: It's better than Islamic Jihad, Al Qaeda, the Israeli Occupation Force, and the Republican Party all rolled into one. As soon as you finish a cup, you immediately experience the full and complete consequences of all your actions.

It will be incredibly popular, since everyone is certain that their own hands are clean and they are right. A global advertising campaign can be arranged via satellite TV, Internet, billboards, and newspapers. Like Nescafe' and Coca-Cola, it will be equally popular with rich and poor, Arab and American, Buddhist and Atheist.

So you want to know exactly where you stand on the divine scale of judgment, exactly how your deeds balance between absolute Good and absolute Evil? Try a refreshing cup of Instant Karma. No longer shall you bite your nails from guilt or neurosis. All shall be revealed. Only 10 cents a cup when you buy the one-pound can, or \$1.00 made hot for you and served in a plastic cup at your local convenience store.

Jenin

Jenin is a mid-sized town in the north of the West Bank. It spreads across foothills covered with pine and olive trees onto a flat plane of agricultural fields. There are other smaller villages in the surrounding hills and on the valley floor. Jenin is the urban hub of the surrounding area- politically similar to a township in the eastern U.S. This locality is known as Jenin Area. Prior to the second, or Al Aksa, intifada Jenin was an economic center, a place where many people came to buy and sell goods. Many people came from Israel to do business here.

The ecosystem is akin to the high desert of eastern Oregon or Washington: dry, rocky, scrub bushes, hardy plants, grass, drought-resistant pines and, of course, olive trees. The colors of the land in February are the vibrant green of grass, the silver grey of olive trunks, beige sandstone streaked with orange, blue, peach, brown and white goats, purple, yellow, and red wild flowers. The land is not wild as it is in America: sheep and goats have grazed here for thousands of years, olive orchards have been terraced into hillsides, oranges and lemons planted in valleys. The land is broken in, worn, worked like an old pair of boots.

Anyone will tell you that there are many problems in Palestine, and in Jenin. Of course there are many problems everywhere, but they take various shapes according to locality. Few people outside Palestine grasp the scale of the killings, the systematic destruction of infrastructure, and the various human costs of occupation. Still less are conscious of the environmental tragedies that result directly from occupation. Perhaps this should be a truism: people grow from and are sustained by the ecosystem in the same ways as trees and animals; thus our survival is completely dependent on the well being of the species we share the land with, and our violent colonialism disturbs and imbalances the ecosystem just as it disrupts human lives. Yosef, a policeman from the nearby village of Berqin, explained some of the environmental problems in this area: in the past, gazelles lived in the forests and orchards. They are disappearing. Pesticides from a settlement near the village of Anin wash down hill into a canal that runs through town. Children play in this canal. Pesticides also contaminate the drinking water there. There are abnormally high rates of brain cancer in that village.

A local man described occupation this way: "they want land without people." It is a typical colonial process, similar to the way that North America was taken from the native people there. Land and resources are annexed by force. For example, a section of field, olive orchard, and pine forest will soon become inaccessible to the residents of nearby Abba. Two settlements lie in the hills above Abba. Settlements are usually built on hilltops. There are various reasons for this, not the least of which is military: like forts, these colonies have a commanding view of the land around them, and are in good position to shoot Palestinians who approach. There is already a road that goes to both of them, another road is scheduled to be built. This "settlement bypass road", as it is called, will make it difficult to reach the land. Settlement roads are patrolled by Israeli army jeeps and armored personnel carriers, so farmers and ordinary people would have to risk being shot, arrested, or abused in order to walk their own orchards. Problems here are

layered like trash in an abandoned lot: an existing road to the same settlements goes directly through the middle of town, bisecting the Palestinian road. Soldiers often park Jeeps and APCs on the settlement road, arbitrarily blocking grade school children and teachers from attending class.

A friend once told me, "all wars are wars of acquisition." The goal of occupation is blindingly clear: take the land, take the resources, and destroy whatever gets in the way. The question of how religious, ethnic, or ancient this conflict may be is not an excuse for continued human rights violations. History is a text which we may learn from, which we can use to formulate creative solutions for present-day problems, not fuel to feed the fires of continued oppression in both Israel and Palestine. If Israel seriously wants to end "terrorism", the occupation of West Bank and Gaza must first be ended. As Frederico, an Israeli citizen and activist in Tel Aviv, said "ending the occupation is the minimum, not the maximum but the absolute minimum." In real terms, this means withdrawing all military support to settlements outside of Israel's pre 1967 borders and ending all military invasion of the West Bank and Gaza. Since Israel annexed this land in the 1967 war, settlements have constantly increased. The 1996 Oslo agreement did not stop settlement and land theft. As long as this colonization continues, it will provoke a violent resistance.

I have met people who are active in Palestinian armed resistance. Many of them are kind, intelligent people who know exactly what they are fighting for and why they are fighting. They are fighting for their land, their community, and their god-- what they believe is sacred and their own. Armed resistance takes many forms. 'Suicide bombings' are one of them. Firing at armed tanks and soldiers in jeeps is another. The armed resistance is vastly outnumbered and outgunned. They have rifles, materials for a few bombs, and the odd rocket or mortar. Palestine is a very poor country. Israel receives billions of dollars of U.S. foreign aid, in the form of free money and loans. This is money paid in taxes by the American people. I do not seek to justify any attacks which kill civilians; I simply believe it is important to understand the situation.

In April 2002 the Israeli army came into Jenin, destroyed 200 houses and many shops, and killed 52 people. This incident has been called various things, including a massacre, a Palestinian propaganda lie, and a tragic consequence of modern urban warfare. Walking down the road from Old Jenin to Jenin Camp (where people live who were displaced by the creation of the nation of Israel in 1948, still called a refugee camp after 54 years) one can see wrecked shops, broken cinder block structures charred black, broken windows in apartment buildings caused by gunshots. There is a shahid graveyard outside Jenin Camp, surrounded by Eucalyptus and orange trees, decorated with colorful banners, flowers, and sentimental offerings left by mourners, just like any graveyard anywhere except that the colors are brighter and all the people buried there have died as a result of occupation.

The day before yesterday tanks drove into the middle of Jenin. They just drove down the street into town, drove away, turned around, came back, and shot a 10 year old boy in the leg. I saw him at the hospital. Maybe he threw a rock at the tank; maybe not. Later that night another child came by the apartment. He had a plaster cast on his left foot and used a broom handle for a crutch. He is a normal,

Soldier

On the Egged bus from Jerusalem to Ashqelon, a young female soldier sits next to me. Her demeanor is quiet and gentle. She wears an olive drab uniform and carries a fluorescent yellow backpack. She is 19 years old.

"How do you like being in the army?" I ask.

"After one year, I'm tired of the routine," she says.

"What work do you do?"

"I test ammunition."

"So you actually shoot different kinds of bullets and blow up grenades and stuff?"

"Yes."

"Do women ever serve in Occupied Palestine?"

"In some jobs, yes."

She seems a little taken aback by the last question. At this point the bus stops and she gets off.

For some reason, the pants issued to women soldiers are tight around the ass and thighs, while men's pants are loose in the same regions.

She is bored with the routine already.

The mark of Army shows on her: it's colors are dark olive drab, like the painted armor of a tank, and reddish-black, somewhere between the tint of oiled gun barrels and polished boots. The mark of Army is a blood clot that interferes with the circulation of thought. She's a nice girl nonetheless.

I remember her because of her personality. She's the girl who will approach the nearest, is the least afraid. She has a better chance of living past the age of 30 than the boys do. I hope that she keeps that intrepid wildness alive in this land of rigid gender roles.

VI.

It is important to believe in the animal honesty of young children. Without this faith, we are lost. As the notorious American storyteller and folk singer Utah Phillips said, "I love kids. All kids are assholes, but they are their *own* assholes."



healthy 12-year-old, with a mischievous, playful glint in his eyes. Soldiers shot him in the foot from a tank.

Downtown Jenin is busy with shops, bakeries, falafel stands, outdoor fruit and vegetable vendors, yellow and pink signs in calligraphic Arabic, carefully stacked piles of strawberries, bananas hanging in clumps, men sitting, drinking tea, fiddling with Islamic prayer beads, eating, Mercedes taxis, the occasional Volkswagen beetle or van. This is a passionate, social culture. People sit close together, touch each other often. Life goes on in all its confusion and beauty despite military incursions. With careful attention, however, one can see the street signs crushed into twisted scrap metal, the bullet holes in supporting columns, the places where asphalt has been broken by tank treads.

People know the relationship between the United States and the Israeli state. It's obvious: the apache helicopters which sometimes fly overhead and occasionally fire into houses, the M-16s, the F-16s, the bombs, are all made in America. Sometimes people call the tanks American tanks or joke that the bombs say "made in America" on them. One local man said to me, "the American people are unintentionally responsible for our suffering." Many people want to talk to me specifically because I am an American. Many are visibly angry and hurt when discussing the subject. "Why Bush?" they ask. "Why does America want to make war on Iraq, when Israel and North Korea have nuclear weapons?" Some think Clinton was better than Bush. My international companions here can simply say, "I'm from Sweden," or "I'm from Denmark." No problem. But it has become routine for me to say I'm American, and I think Bush is bad and crazy. That's the only way I can convey in broken Arabic that I do not support a unilateral racist policy of world domination which includes support for the occupation and war on Iraq. Like this: "Where are you from?"

"America. But Bush Mazhnoon. Mishqayez."

The wonderful thing is that virtually everyone here understands that there is a difference between the people of a nation and it's government. I can only hope that more Americans will make this distinction in the near future. I went into a small metal shop today to ask for water. Of course the workers there invited me to sit and drink coffee with them. Surrounded by engines in various states of disassembly, welding projects, an oxyacetylene torch, etc., I sat with Nasser and Makmoud. Nasser speaks some English. When I told him I was American he said flat out, "We understand that the problem is with the government of America, the government of Israel, the government of Iraq, and the government of Palestine, not with the people. You are welcome here." The danger in Jenin does not spring from being an American, although people may judge you based on this status. The real danger is being mistaken for an Israeli soldier or Israeli collaborator, since such people are immediate threats to Palestinians.

Generally people respect me for the same reason they do anywhere:

because I am respectful to them. A 23-year-old man recently started calling me "William Bush". At first I got angry and tried to explain that I don't support U.S. imperialism. He kept it up, so I called him "Yosef Arafat." To this he replied, "Yosef Sharon. . . Arafat is worse than Sharon." After that we got along much better and just messed with each other's heads. He still calls me William Bush.

Children

I.
Sha'hid blood still crimson as roses in a florist's display window, washed downhill by gravity, flows in the same timeless patterns as rainwater:

Blood and muddy water form a thin film over worn asphalt.

Someone has placed old cinder blocks and spare paving bricks as a symbolic barrier to distinguish the territory of awestruck mourning from the everyday street where taxis and ambulances already weave between tangled knots of pedestrian traffic, only one half hour after the tanks and jeeps went away.

After the adults encircle the blood, stand, stare, then split into cliques buzzing with conversation, two children step into the red place forgotten by adulthood.

Kid picks a slug from the stained street and holds it curious in midday sun. He walks into the crowd and away.

Thin copper plate smeared with red on that spent led slug clutched between eight-year-old fingers.

II.
Boy walks up to the armored personnel carrier, bag of schoolbooks on his back. His head is level with the top of its massive treads. The soldiers above do not see him. They are busy checking some adult's ID card and playing with the trigger guards of their M-16s.

The Arabic word Palestinians use to describe tanks literally translates as "elephant." The word for armored personnel carrier means "death machine." This kid is maybe in second or third grade, but still he retains the genius of childhood: sure, he sees an elephant and a death machine in the road, but he also sees the open space beside them, the roadbed crushed by tank treads and wrecked by bulldozers but still passable.

He stands quiet, brown eyes, blue coat, curious face asking, "Why is there a tank in the road? Why can't I go home?"

III.
At the foot of the staircase stands a ten-foot metal fence with a padlocked gate and sharp triangular wedges of metal welded to the top. Someone has bent half of these tabs over, rendering them an ineffective deterrent to the local children who climb through the gap between this fence and the stairwell ceiling, then come knocking uninvited on our third-story apartment door.

A kid named Ahkmed hops around on one foot and uses a broomstick as a crutch. He is ten years old and wears a heavy plaster cast on his left foot because a tank shot him. Tobias has befriended him and promised to buy him a coat and shoes in exchange for doing some small work. He tells the other boys to go away when they get out of control.

Tomorrow I leave for Jerusalem. I go downstairs with Jamal to let him out of the gate. Jamal is twenty-something and an absolute sweetheart, thin, intelligent, a bit of a loner, somewhat neurotic. He worked in Israel, but after his brother was killed he quit and came home to stay. He wears knit sweaters with buttons up the front like a prep school student. Last night he said, "Life is miserable. I want to die because then I will go to Heaven. Heaven is better than this life." Maybe he's right. He wants to go to university, but since he has no money he cannot. He says that the traditional way is to eat with your right hand, because the devil lives in your left ear. That's why he washes his left ear with his left hand in the morning, before prayers and breakfast: to get the devil out of it. This may be a polite story to explain a tradition remnant of the old days, when you wiped your ass with your left hand and ate with your right hand. In any case, everyone thinks it's hilarious that the devil lives in your left ear and you have to wash him out of it in the morning.

I go downstairs with Jamal. It is night and seven children run to the foot of the stairs. Us foreigners are zoo animals to them: I am an albino ant eater inside my barred cage. I open the gate. Jamal tells the kids to go away. They move off laughing, all in a line, each with hands on the shoulders of the kid in front. Jamal explains that this is a game: they pretend to be a train, the first kid counts "one," the second "two," the third "three," and so on. After the caboose kid sings out her number, the engineer kid runs around to the back end of the train and the counting starts all over.

Jamal is going to Jericho to get trained so he can be a soldier, even though he has no business being a soldier. He's from the refugee camp, he's broke, and he understands enough about the general dynamics of racism and oppression to be hurt and pissed. Thus his career options are limited.

IV.
In Rafah, 6-year old Ali was shot dead by a sniper while walking home from school. Rachel says the children call out his name in the street.

"ALI!"
"ALI!"
"ALI!"

V.
Salaam talks to me twice at the Abba road checkpoint. Her name means peace. She's sharp, has long brown curly hair, dimples, and an angular birdlike nose. She says the same things they all say: "What's your name? Where are you from?"